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# INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

THE EXECUTIVE SOURCE FOR PLANNING MEETINGS & INCENTIVES

Jon Petz, CSP  
Emcee at FICP 2019

# 2020 OUTLOOK



FICP Executive  
Director  
**Steve Bova**  
on the State  
of the Insurance  
& Financial  
Meetings  
Industry

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# INSURANCE & FINANCIAL MEETINGS MANAGEMENT

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DECEMBER 2019

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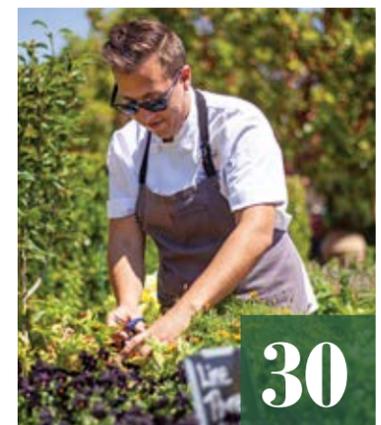
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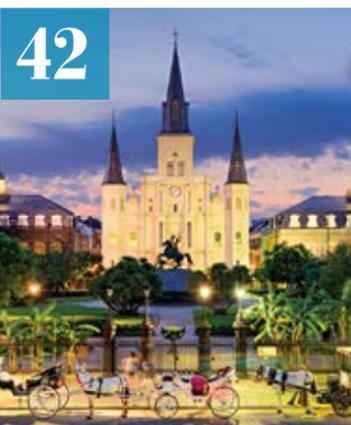
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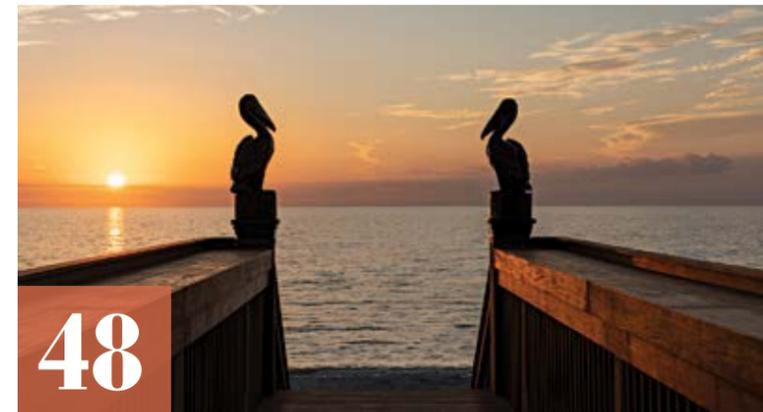
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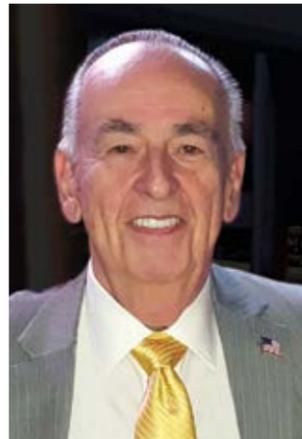
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## FICP Sets Attendance Record at Annual Conference

While attending the recent Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP) annual conference held in Austin, Texas, we gained input from Steve Bova, CAE, executive director, on a number of areas that will affect insurance and financial planners going forward in 2020. We also learned about current conditions as to what's new and exciting with-



in the association as it continues to grow and increase membership. Every conference presents opportunities that show the uniqueness of the venue. FICP partnered with the host convention and visitors bureau, Visit Austin, to offer a pre-event city tour while Visit Austin also hosted an evening event that played up the city's reputation for fantastic live music. Numerous takeaways for attendees resulted from the breakout sessions offered throughout the event. Continuing as popular offerings were the Meeting Professional Exchange, Speaker Showcase and an interactive CSR activity. Wayne Robinson, FICP 2019 chairman and assistant vice president, shared the

organization's strategic pillars: growth, value and influence. If you are not a member of FICP, now is the time to join and take advantage of the many benefits. Read the interview with Bova in "2020 Industry Outlook" beginning on page 18.

Food has always been a priority with meeting planners, so we are focusing on F&B with the inside scoop on the future food scene beginning on Page 30. Know your audience says Elise Kaiser, program manager with Bishop-McCann LLC, an industry leader in producing meetings, incentive programs and events worldwide. Food diversity and global cuisine are extremely important with an international attendee base.

Check out the winners of the 2019 "World Class Award" as voted by the subscribers of Insurance & Financial Meetings Management magazine starting on Page 54. Also in this issue, don't miss the update on New Orleans and Florida, both popular destinations that continue to offer compelling reasons to consider them for your future meetings or incentive programs.

Harvey Grotsky

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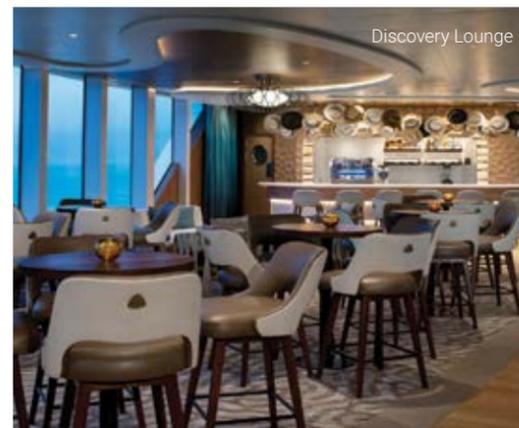
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## THE BROADMOOR ANNOUNCES NEW 110,000-SF EXHIBITION HALL

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO — The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, one of Colorado's top destinations for events, will soon offer the most luxurious trade show and exhibition hall experience in the industry, as the only Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond-awarded hotel in the country to operate a large, on-site exhibition space. When the newly-announced 110,000 sf of exhibition space and associated breakout rooms debut next spring, the resort will be able to provide the highest level of service large conference or trade show attendees



The new Broadmoor Exhibit Hall

can receive. Together the exhibit hall addition and the existing Broadmoor Hall, International Center and Colorado Hall will comprise 'The Broadmoor Event Center,' with a combined square footage of more than 300,000 sf. The new exhibit building

will be located next to Broadmoor Hall, and a new 30-foot wide, 180-foot long hallway will serve as a substantial connector. The facility will also provide 32 breakout rooms wired with built-in screens and the most modern technology.

## HARD ROCK INTERNATIONAL ANNOUNCES PLANS FOR HARD ROCK CASINO BRISTOL IN VIRGINIA; WILL TEAM WITH BRISTOL RESORT & CASINO TO RUN PROPOSED RESORT

HOLLYWOOD, FL — Hard Rock Casino announced plans to open a location in Bristol, Virginia. Hard Rock International plans to team with Bristol Resort & Casino to run the proposed resort and casino. "We are excited to collaborate with Hard Rock, a well-respected and legendary entertainment brand with legions of devoted customers across the country and around the world," Jim McGlothlin, CEO of The United Company and partner on the project, says. "Hard Rock's iconic brand speaks to its

deep roots in live music entertainment and world-class memorabilia collection, which will play a prominent role at Hard Rock Casino Bristol. This focus on music will complement our region's country music heritage and dynamic music scene in the Twin City." The casino must pass several legislative steps, both state and local, in 2020 before the casino plan is approved. Bristol, Virginia is 300 miles southwest of Richmond near the Virginia-Tennessee border.

## HYATT RESORTS OPEN IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

CAP CANA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC — The Hyatt Ziva and Hyatt Zilara, all-inclusive resorts, in Cap Cana, Dominican Republic, opened recently. The two resorts are Hyatt's first in the Dominican Republic. Set on 40 acres on Juanillo Beach,

Hyatt Ziva and Hyatt Zilara in the Dominican Republic are owned and operated by Playa Hotels & Resorts.

the resorts are owned and operated by Playa Hotels & Resorts. While the Hyatt Zilara is exclusively for adults, both resorts offer shared amenities, including

nine dining venues, water sports, cooking lessons and painting classes, and the Larimar Spa with a Himalayan salt lounge. The resorts are offering a 55% discount off the standard rate on bookings made by the end of the year.

## MARGARITAVILLE LAKE RESORT, LAKE CONROE-HOUSTON, WILL OPEN IN 2020

THE WOODLANDS (HOUSTON), TX — BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, will operate the first Margaritaville Resort in Texas. Scheduled to open next summer, the Margaritaville Lake Resort, Lake Conroe-Houston, will offer an array of recreational activities, including an 18-hole golf

course and a 3-acre water park with a lazy river and outdoor pools. The resort will feature 72,000 sf of indoor/outdoor, IACC approved meeting space and can host special events and meetings of every size. The Margaritaville Lake Resort, Lake Conroe, will be part of Benchmark's signature brand, Benchmark Resorts & Hotels. "Benchmark is very excited to be part of this groundbreaking project that will bring the iconic Margaritaville brand to the Houston market, and to our neighbors throughout the Lone Star State, and beyond," says Alex Cabañas, Benchmark CEO.



MGM Resorts International won the 'EPIC' award.

## MGM RESORTS INTERNATIONAL RECOGNIZED WITH 'EPIC' AWARD BY EXPEDIA GROUP

LAS VEGAS — MGM Resorts International was recently honored with the 'EPIC' Award for outstanding lodging at explore '19 in Las Vegas by Expedia Group, a global travel technology platform that hosts full-service travel research, planning and booking. The accolade celebrates organizations that exude the values of engagement, partnership, innovation and collaboration,

and continue to explore new and creative ways to work together to inspire travel. Expedia Group presented six 'EPIC' Awards to partners in the travel industry, celebrating inspirational lodging, air, car, activities, cruise and media solutions partners in Latin America and North America. MGM Resorts was one of two winners selected in the lodging category. "This prestigious recognition

is an incredible honor for our team members," Lee Ann Benavidez, vice president of Transient Strategy and Sales Operations for MGM Resorts International, says. "I'd like to thank Expedia Group for their commitment to our partnership and for recognizing MGM Resorts in our endeavor to always offer our guests best-in-class experiences and outstanding service."

## BOB MOORE AND NANCY NOVOGROD INDUCTED INTO U.S. TRAVEL HALL OF LEADERS

WASHINGTON, DC — Travel industry leaders Bob Moore, former longtime Hilton executive, and Nancy Novogrod, the 21-year editor-in-chief of Travel + Leisure, are honored as the 2019 inductees into the U.S. Travel Association Hall of Leaders. Moore began his career in the travel industry, dedicating more than 20 years to the Hilton Hotels Corporation. After 22 years, he took his expertise first to the Los Angeles Convention and Visitors Bureau, followed by Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, and finally to Freeman. Additionally, Moore served as national chair of the U.S. Travel Association, previously named Travel Industry Association of America, in 1995, and led Meeting Professionals International (MPI). For the highly regarded Travel + Leisure magazine, Novogrod served as editor-in-chief from 1993-2014. She evolved the industry-leading brand



L-R: Elliott Ferguson, Destination DC president and CEO and U.S. Travel National Chair; Bob Moore; Nancy Novogrod; and Roger Dow, U.S. Travel president and CEO.

over her 21-year career at the publication, bringing the title into the digital age, as well as innovating Travel + Leisure's prestigious World's Best Awards and leading the annual "America's Favorite Places" survey. Since departing Travel + Leisure in 2014, Novogrod has launched Culturati Travel Design, an enterprise that curates intimate group-travel experiences, as well as individual and family trips in affiliation with Valerie Wilson Travel. Inducted as distin-

guished individuals to U.S. Travel's Hall of Leaders for "sustained, noteworthy contributions that have positively impacted the travel industry and raised industry-wide standards," Moore and Novogrod were honored at a dinner attended by more than 100 travel industry leaders.

## ROYAL CARIBBEAN COMPLETES OASIS OF THE SEAS MAKEOVER

MIAMI, FL — Royal Caribbean's Oasis of the Seas has recently received \$165 million in refurbishments and improvements, including many elements that first appeared on Royal Caribbean's Quantum-class ships. Among those elements are the two-story Music Hall and the Bionic Bar, where two robotic bartenders mix drinks for passengers. Also retrofitted onto the ship was a package of slides that weren't part of Royal Caribbean's featured lineup when the Oasis debuted in 2009. The package includes the 10-story Ultimate Abyss dry slide and the Perfect Storm, three high-speed water slides



known as Typhoon, Cyclone and Super-cell. Other features that have debuted on Quantum ships or on recent makeovers of Oasis-class ships include the Lime & Coconut multistory pool deck bar, a Sugar Beach candy store, an El Loco Fresh casual Mexican eatery and a Playmakers Sports Bar & Arcade.



El Distrito is an entertainment, retail and dining project.

Courtesy El Distrito

## SAN JUAN'S NEW ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX, EL DISTRITO

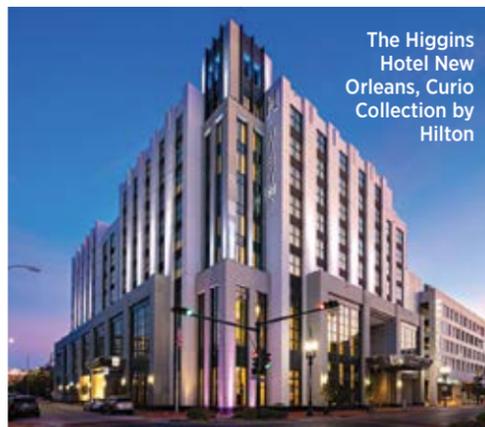
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO — Puerto Rico is a prime destination for meetings, incentives, conferences and events — especially with the addition of El Distrito, an immersive, multi-sensorial, audiovisual and technologically advanced experience as never seen in the Caribbean. From a 177-room ALOFT hotel, an exhilarating urban zip line, a variety of restaurants, bars, lounges, the first day/night disco, and eight premium movie theaters, the 360,000-sf state-of-the-art entertainment, retail and dining project combines the best in art, music, technology and hospitality. El Distrito offers the ease of doing business with a U.S. destination, plus the allure of a Caribbean island filled with unique history and culture.

## RITZ-CARLTON, ST. THOMAS OPENS IN USVI

ST. THOMAS, VIRGIN ISLANDS — The Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas has officially reopened, following closure since the 2017 hurricanes. The property underwent a \$100 million restoration and renovation that included a re-designed infinity pool, a new Sicilian restaurant called Alloro, a new 60-foot Lady Lynsey II catamaran for sailing excursions, new activities and culinary offerings with a farm-to-fork focus. An additional pool is slated to debut in early 2020.

## THE HIGGINS HOTEL NEW ORLEANS OFFICIALLY OPENS

NEW ORLEANS — The National WWII Museum has recently announced the official opening of its landmark hotel property The Higgins Hotel New Orleans, Curio Collection by Hilton. Located in the Arts and Warehouse District in New Orleans, the Hotel features 18,000 sf of meeting and event space, all set with a tasteful Art Deco design. The Hotel is the first in the state of Louisiana to be part of the exclusive Curio Collection by Hilton, and all proceeds generated will support the ongoing educational mission of the Museum. As an extension of the Museum, the Hotel sits directly on the campus of the city's top attraction and tells the story of World War II through the unique lens of design, decor, era-inspired menus and entertainment.



The Higgins Hotel New Orleans, Curio Collection by Hilton

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# FICP 2019

Austin, Texas November 10-13, 2019

FICP's flagship annual event, held at the Fairmont Austin Hotel, brought together meetings professionals and hospitality partners from around the globe for three days of timely education, unique networking opportunities and an overall unforgettable event. FICP's vision is to amplify the positive impact and value of financial services and insurance industry meetings and events professionals.



# How to Lead and Succeed in the Age of Constant Disruption

## New Leadership Strategies Can Help You Survive and Thrive Despite Ongoing Uncertainty

BY SCOTT STEINBERG

So much for the idea of ‘status quo.’ As it pays to remind event attendees, while modern executives are no strangers to change and disruption, things only get more topsy-turvy for working professionals from here. In fact, according to recent surveys by consulting firm PwC, no two days on the job ever will be the same again. That’s because across every region of the world and every commercial sector, market leaders explain that the only consistent theme you can count on in coming years is: Unpredictability.

Think you’ve got a handle on how fast today’s business world moves? Think again. As we were shocked to find while researching our recent book, “Lead with Your Heart,” uncertainty is now the only certainty at work. The next 10 years will bring more change than the prior 10,000 years. And — thanks to rapid advancements in technology and communications tools — the one thing organizational leaders can count on going forward is that they’ll only be hit with more unforeseen disruptions harder, faster and from more angles than ever before. So what’s a forward-thinking executive to do if they want to help their enterprise stay ahead of the curve? Simple: Change

up their leadership and management style to make leadership a concept that scales. Provide workers the insights they need to facilitate more dynamic decision-making, provide staffers with all the tools they need to stay better attuned to signals that the marketplace is sending them, and be faster about adapting to these developments in turn.

Bearing this in mind, and that business and cultural trends are now evolving at an unprecedented pace, it’s no surprise that business leaders around the world note that strategic priorities for any organization hoping to get ahead in coming years must also evolve. Among the concepts they say, it’s now vital to champion to your staff at meetings and events, are the importance of:

- Developing and maximizing a globally aware and globally influenced pool of talent.
- Fostering a culture of employee engagement and continuous learning.
- Putting productivity, not process, at the heart of your operating strategy.
- Routinely daring to disrupt your operations before outside forces disrupt them for you.
- Making a commitment to ongoing organizational improvement.

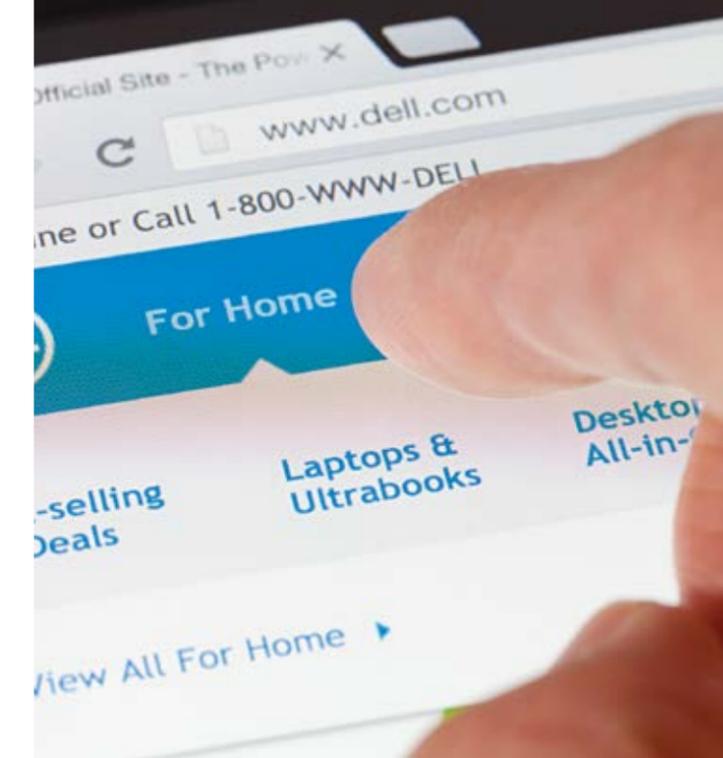
But most importantly, they also note that the best way to get ahead in uncertain times is always to double down and reinvest in your people — and that doing so can pay off in huge ways, because people are your most important asset today.

Taking this into account, today’s most effective leaders realize that here and now — while things are going well, and you can most afford to take chances — is the most opportune time to start making a host of smart investments in initiatives that drive constant learning and growth for their organization. And that it’s also the best time to start encouraging staffers to get behind the idea of making more insight-driven decisions, and educating themselves through a running process of trial and error that involves constantly brainstorming and testing a variety of new strategies and solutions.

Because in uncertain times, as we discovered, the irony is that you’ve got to take more risks, not fewer, if you want to get ahead. But these risks have to come in the form of small, smart, cost-effective bets designed as ongoing learning experiments that can help you quickly gain deeper insights into the shape of changing operating landscapes and make better and more informed choices as you become more informed. Likewise, to stay relevant — let alone ahead of the curve — organizations also have to start being more deliberate about putting systems and programs in place that can help front-line staffers assume more of an ownership role in driving workplace decisions.



THE AUTHOR



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That’s because, ironically, studies of the world’s most innovative firms repeatedly show that end-users — everyday customers, strategic partners, various internal/external stakeholders that we serve, etc. — are the No. 1, most reliable proven source where organizations get successful new ideas. And yet, at the same time, research also tells us that less than a third of organizations have effective systems in place for capturing this feedback and using it to create winning solutions. Keeping this in mind, the real question you should be asking yourself as an executive leader going forward — and encouraging your co-workers to ask themselves — isn’t “Do we have what it takes to compete?” as your organization. It’s “Are we doing everything we can to give our people all the tools and resources they need to be listening to these insights, and promptly and intelligently responding to them in turn?”

Hailed as the World’s Leading Business Strategist, award-winning professional speaker **Scott Steinberg** is among today’s best-known trends experts and futurists, and the bestselling author of “Lead with Your Heart,” “Make Change Work for You: 10 Ways to Future-Proof Yourself, Fearlessly Innovate, and Succeed Despite Uncertainty” and “Millennial Marketing: Bridging the Generation Gap.” The president and CEO of BIZDEV: The International Association for Business Development and Strategic Partnerships, his website is **AKeynoteSpeaker.com**.

Dell EMC asks its employees to help solve its biggest problems through an Innovation Contest.

For example, Dell EMC is a market leader in the field of IT and big data. It has 60,000 employees worldwide. But when it has a huge, hard problem it just can’t seem to solve? It routinely puts the challenge to its employees in the form of an Innovation Contest. Workers are invited to suggest ideas for innovative new solutions — and can comment on these ideas, give colleagues feedback and vote on which are turned into real-world prototypes and products. But, it turns out that many of the firm’s most successful ven-

tures are happening when employees worldwide are independently teaming up on their own time to bring new ideas to life that they found online, which weren’t technically contest winners.

Likewise, you can see a host of government agencies employing similar solutions for accelerating and scaling innovation at Challenge.gov, a website where institutions like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Dept. of Defense put up contests asking the general public and private sector for help with tasks such as designing better healthcare programs or building better underground bunkers. Prizes for winning solutions can often exceed \$1 million — but it’s often a small price to pay, comparatively, for creating platforms that allow them to radically multiply the number of winning ideas, insights and solutions these programs can help surface.

Long story short — when it comes to getting ahead despite disruption, and finding ways to successfully navigate through change, even as an experienced team leader, it often pays to find more ways to step back and let others take the lead. The more you look to make leadership and innovation concepts that scale, and put programs and platforms in place to rapidly transform ideas into reality — say a running conference program or series of experiential events and educational salons — the more successful you’ll be, no matter what the future brings. **I&FM**

# Better Together

## How to Find and Maintain the Right DMC Partnership for Your Company

BY CINDY Y. LO, DMCP

**F**inancial and insurance services meetings professionals should all know how valuable DMCs can be, having all worked with them countless times to create great events and meeting experiences. But if you want to take your meeting planning work to the next level and create truly unique and unforgettable meeting experiences for your attendees (and, yes, stay within your budget), consider turning to DMCs as a partner for next-level event strategizing and optimal meeting execution.

When you have the right DMC as your partner, it can become an extension of your team and your brand. You can spend more of your time and energy on internal politics and making sure the company goals are being met. Remember, when you are the in-house meetings professional, you wear multiple hats — from providing that 10,000-foot view to your stakeholders on the program's ROI to the

overall company's goals, to making sure the program content and design truly reflect the company's culture. Meanwhile, your DMC partner acts as your eyes and ears on the ground, keeping you informed while helping you find better and more effective ways to stretch your budget creatively.

We would love to share an insider's peek at how our relationship works. We have been fortunate to work together as meetings professionals: Kendra Heredia, Marketing Manager for NORCAL Group and DMC Cindy Y. Lo, Red Velvet Events (RVE) for over a decade now, and our partnership has only gotten stronger over the years because of the trust we have established with one another. One of the many reasons we work so well together is because RVE handles Kendra's programs and meetings as if they were its own. Because she was historically a team of one, and her recently expanded team supports many other national marketing efforts in addition to event design, RVE significantly augments its on-site staff

From left, Jason Sick, Sarah Lo and Kendra Heredia. Sick and Lo are team members at Red Velvet Events, while Heredia is Marketing Manager for NORCAL Group.

size to accommodate her events. This ensures the best experience possible for her company's incentive meeting.

A productive and effective meetings professional and DMC partnership can only work if you have the right DMC on your side. So how do you find the perfect match for your company?

As the meetings professional, first you need to identify the role your DMC will play in your event. Will they be responsible for execution only, strategy only, or a combination of strategy and execution? You will also need to screen DMCs to identify their work styles and determine if they will be compatible with your work style. In addition, be prepared to share important information with the DMC, such as why you are planning this meeting, how you and the stakeholders measure success, who is the audience, and — of course — what the budget allows.

We want to remind you that the key component to a successful DMC-to-client relationship is trust. Kendra has to know that her DMC partner will treat her clients and agency partners as their own. RVE is an extension of NORCAL Group's brand and must deliver an unforgettable experience and anticipate the needs of its customers just as we would. This is why our tenured relationship has been so successful. RVE understands Kendra and NORCAL Group, and that allows her to focus on other areas of the event to ensure its success.

Here are some specific questions you can ask a DMC to help determine if they are a good fit for you, your company and your program:



COURTESY OF CINDY Y. LO

When you have the right DMC as your partner, it can become an extension of your team and your brand.

- What's your communication preference? For example, does the DMC prefer communicating over the phone, email or text? Most importantly, does that work for you, the meetings professional?

- What's the typical workload for your DMC program manager? This can give you visibility into how many other events the DMC will be working on in addition to yours.

- How soon will I be assigned a program manager, and what does the team support look like on my end? These questions can help you figure out if you'll have one point of contact or several, as well as how often your contact(s) will be on-site versus in the office. The last thing you want is to keep reaching out to your DMC point of contact and get nothing but out-of-office replies.

- Are there any standard practices that you do as a DMC that are different from a typical DMC? If so, can you describe them? Anything from a work style to a company philosophy is good to know up front, so you can decide if it will help or hurt your working relationship.

Once you find a DMC that will work well with you and your event, it can be the beginning of a beautiful partnership. Just make sure that expectations are clearly outlined, and the lines of communication stay open. Then see how much bigger and better your meetings and incentives can become. **I&MM**



THE AUTHOR

When **Cindy Y. Lo, DMCP** started Red Velvet Events (RVE) 17 years ago, she did so with the mission to Outplan, Outplay and Outparty. Red Velvet Events is a boutique creative events agency helping global brands ideate, design and execute their experiential events since 2002. Cindy is a recent author of "Behind the Red Velvet Curtain." Connect with RVE on all the major social media channels (@RedVelvetEvents). Lo calls Austin, Texas home with her husband of 14 years and their two children. This article originally appeared on ficpnet.com. Visit ficpnet.com/blog.

# Budgeting for Uncertainty

## Experts Predict a Possible Downturn in the Second Half of 2020

BY KYLE JORDAN, ED.M., MS, CAE, CMM, CMP

Every year, whether we want to or not, there comes a time when we must start working on our budgets. Budgeting allows us to create a spending plan to help us best achieve our financial goals for the upcoming fiscal cycle. However, what happens when you're trying to create a budget in a year of potential economic uncertainty?

If you've been following some of the press, both industry-wide and otherwise, there have been gentle whisperings about the potential of an economic slow down and maybe even a little 'r' recession in 2020. Now, I'm not a fortune teller, but I'm concerned about budgeting for the 2020 economy, and it's my responsibility to understand how economic fluctuations can impact our budgets and our budget forecasting.

### WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT A SLOWDOWN, OR LITTLE 'R' RECESSION?

While there are lots of potential causes for a possible slow down — trade wars, the impact of Brexit, possible instability of the oil supply and our own upcoming election

cycle, to name a few — there are data points and trends to which we as meetings professionals need to pay attention.

Recently, news reports gave us our first real inside the industry insight of a possible slow down with the article, "Corporate Group Bookings Decline for 2020: Cvent Data." The article, which focuses on the data from Cvent's Group Business Outlook report, indicated that group bookings will continue to increase during Q1 and Q2 of 2020 before taking a negative turn in Q3 and remaining negative through the first half of 2021. Outside of our industry, the RV Industry Association reported in July that "the total number of RV shipments dropped by 23.2 percent in July compared to the previous year. The drop was the 12th-straight month of year-over-year declines, and 2018 was the first annual decline in RV shipments since 2009."

So, what does this mean exactly, and why do we care if people are buying fewer RVs?

Industry leaders like Michael Dominguez, president and CEO of Associated Luxury Hotels International (ALHI), have long been highlighting the record occupancy and demand, not only from the group business, but from the leisure and transient sectors, thus driving up rates. However, 2019 is the

second year in a row where shipments of recreational vehicles to dealers have fallen, behavior which preceded the last three recessions. And we're starting to see growth and demand slowing in the hotel market. So what does this mean exactly? With luxury purchases like RVs slowing down and booking patterns reducing comparatively to the growth of inventory, we're likely to see some stabilization and rate corrections in the markets (courtesy GBTA).

### BUDGETING HACKS IN PREPARATION FOR THE SLOWDOWN

Every meetings professional has their own approach to budgeting, but here are some steps I'm taking to help lessen any significant hits on my expense line items in my 2020 budget.

- Short-term meetings (2020 meetings not yet booked). Play the waiting game: I'm holding off on booking meetings in Q3 and Q4 in 2020. What are the current conditions and trends in the market where you'll be taking your 2020



THE AUTHOR

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Planners budgeting for 2020 should take into account the market uncertainty and plan accordingly. Experts predict a possible downturn in the second half of the year.

meetings, especially in Q3 and Q4 of 2020? With the current projections, I'm willing to take a chance that rates may improve as we get closer to those dates and that the opportunity to fill gaps for a better deal may exist.

- Add some clauses. If you have a strong pick-up history, see if you can get your supplier partner to agree to a no attrition or significantly lowered attrition clause.

- Consider virtual. Not all meetings have to happen in person. One of the easiest ways to control some of your variable costs is to consider making your event virtual.

- Long-term meetings (already booked/contracted meetings). Use your history: Review your post-2009 recession data and numbers. Over the last few weeks, I've dusted off some of my predecessors' spreadsheets, including budgets and expenses, to see what kind of hit we took in the most recent big 'R' recession. I can tell you, the numbers weren't pretty, but those numbers have given me some insight into the behaviors of my conference participants.

- Review those contracts. Do you have any clauses in your contract that will allow you to proactively reduce your block or food and beverage commitment by an amount or percentage? If so, pay close attention to those dates and consider executing those reductions.

- Hope for the best and budget for the worst. Do you have an attrition or contingency line item in your budget? If not, consider adding one for 2020. We all hate the idea of paying attrition. However, in a down economy, everyone must make ends meet, including our supplier partners. And they may hold you to that attrition clause. Use your occupancy history to determine what amount of attrition you could be liable for and budget accordingly.

While we won't know specifically how and when an economic slowdown or recession will actualize, you can take steps now to make sure you're protecting your budget and your organization from any negative impacts that the economy may throw at you. **I&M**



DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM

Use your occupancy history to determine what amount of attrition you could be liable for and budget accordingly.

# 2020 INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

BY MAURA KELLER

FICP Executive  
Director **Steve Bova**  
on the State of the  
Insurance & Financial  
Meetings Industry



**S**teve Bova, CAE, Financial & Insurance Conference Professionals (FICP) executive director, recently addressed the state of the financial and insurance meetings industry — offering insights into the status of the industry and trends of what meeting professionals should be aware, both now and in the future. FICP is a community of financial service and insurance industry meetings and events professionals dedicated to developing members and advocating the positive impact of their work.

While attending the 2019 FICP Annual Conference in Austin, Texas in November, we gained input from Bova on a number of areas — from current conditions, to industry foresight, to what’s new and exciting within the association for 2020.

**Q: Have there been any recent regulatory changes to the financial and insurance industry meetings, and if so, how will they affect the industry in 2020?**

**A:** There are a lot of regulations that impact the industry, but we are unaware of any that are directly impacting meetings. However, last June, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) voted to adopt a package of rule-makings and interpretations designed to enhance the quality and transparency of retail investors’ relationships with investment advisers and broker-dealers. While the regulations were proposed to take effect in 2020, most companies already have measures in place that would put them in compliance with the proposed changes.

**Q: What other challenges will financial and insurance meeting professionals face in 2020?**

**A:** There is a constant challenge from corporate executives for meetings professionals to continue to make each event better than the previous one, but to use fewer resources. This supports the importance for meetings professionals to educate their executives about changes and trends impacting their meetings, and especially with



PHOTO BY ANTHONY JOHNSON / COURTESY OF FICP

FICP held its 2019 Annual Conference in Austin, Texas in November. Steve Bova, FICP executive director, says the industry is on solid footing as long as face-to-face meetings remain a priority.

respect to the budget. These are opportunities for conversations — an open door to be at the table, especially when there is fresh data to share that the industry makes available.

Equally as important is communicating to attendees in an environment where attention spans are diminishing. You can expect that most attendees don’t read. According to a study by Microsoft, the average human being now has an attention span of eight seconds. This is a sharp decrease from the average attention span of 12 seconds in 2000. Another study showed that people are able to focus for about 17 minutes before losing interest. Hence, the reason for TED Talks. This shows there is a need in our meeting design for shorter presentations, more networking time, ‘wow’ or unique experiences, and creating emotional, long-lasting connections.

**Q: Are the budgets for meetings increasing or decreasing?**

**A:** Several sources indicate budgets are increasing or leveling out, but not decreasing. Budgets generally increased slightly in 2019 over 2018; however, we are seeing signs of caution as 2020 budgets are created. Some are indicating concerns of an economic slowdown — not a recession but slower growth — which is prompting some companies to create scenarios during their budgeting process to anticipate upside and

downside outcomes. Still, nearly 40% of meetings professionals are not adjusting their events in light of discussions around a possible economic slowdown.

**Q: What steps are being taken to increase security at these events?**

**A:** This is one budget line that is not under intense scrutiny, and if so, it’s to ensure there are enough resources dedicated to this area. It’s not a hard sell, considering the environment in which we live. For example, “Our company has always had high security protocols,” says one FICP board member, who continued, “there may be more topics we cover — e.g., active shooter, etc. — but the attention to detail and making it a priority has always existed.”

**Q: What encouraging signs do you see ahead for the financial and insurance services meetings industry?**

**A:** The most encouraging message to share is that there is no evidence that suggests anything will ever replace face-to-face interaction as the most effective means of human connection. We are bullish that the value of and demand for in-person conferences will remain high for the foreseeable future.

According to the FICP Fall 2019 Pulse Survey, slightly more respondents are reporting increases in the

size of business meetings being planned as compared to the spring 2019 survey; however, that growth has not yet returned to 2018 levels. With incentives and the number of business meetings, the majority of meetings professionals are continuing to experience conditions that remain the same. More of those at insurance-only firms reported increases than their counterparts at financial services and combination financial services and insurance companies.

- Keeping it in house. If a meeting is planned outside of a meetings professional’s department, 66% of those respondents indicated that work was being performed by another department in the company rather than externally.

- No risky business. Approximately one-third of meetings professionals lead the development and implementation of risk-management protocols related to meetings and incentives, and more than half indicated they play a contributing role. More of those at financial services firms noted a lead role than peers at other company types. For the majority of meetings professionals with risk-management plans for meetings and incentives, internal security teams were the colleagues who were reported as contributors, followed by legal counsel.

- Sites that ‘wow.’ Overall, uniqueness or a ‘wow’ factor was found to be most influential in the selection of a venue for ancillary activities, followed by event/meeting objectives. Rental fees were a greater influencer on insurance-only companies, whereas uniqueness or a ‘wow’ factor was ranked higher by those at companies offering a combination of financial services and insurance products.

**Q: How did the 2019 Annual Conference differ from previous years?**

**A:** First, 2019 was a record-breaker! Every conference presents opportunities that accentuate the uniqueness of the venue. For the first time, FICP partnered with the host convention & visitors bureau, Visit Austin, to offer a pre-event city tour attended by 30 meetings professionals. Visit Austin hosted an evening event that played up the city’s live music reputation. FICP attendees stepped right onto the dance floor during the evening networking opportunities.

**Q: What are the key takeaways you hope planners received at the conference?**

**A:** While there was an unlimited number of takeaways for attendees in the breakout sessions offered throughout the event, three messages resonated from the main stage:

- Fear is the No. 1 thing that holds people back from accomplishing their dreams. Keynote speaker Ben Nemtin encouraged attendees to unbury their dreams, form a bucket list and begin to live up to their greatness.

- Al Chiaradonna, a senior vice president at SEI Investments and a self-confessed former workaholic, shared his story of creating a journey to promote the integration of life and work.

- Kindra Hall taught attendees how to frame stories, rather than recite numbers and statistics, to capture attention and resonate with their audience — people remember stories.

**Q: What new educational opportunities did FICP offer to its members at the conference?**

**A:** FICP created Meeting Spots in an effort to customize and maximize interaction between meetings professionals and hospitality partners. Using the conference app, Meeting Spots, allowed attendees to meet with their peers and hospitality partners throughout the event at the time and place that works best for them. Continuing as popular offerings were the Meetings Professional Exchange, Speaker Showcase and an interactive CSR activity.

Wayne Robinson, CMP, CMM, FICP 2019 chairman and assistant vice president, FM Global, shared the organization’s strategic pillars: growth, value and influence. He said that growth not only relates to the number of companies represented through individual membership, but also includes personal growth and development and growth in stature and industry influence. Value in FICP speaks from the context of continuous professional growth and development, and the ability to tap into the association as a year-long experience in addition to attending up to six face-to-face events. Influence refers to meetings professionals as thought leaders

**There is a need in our meeting design for shorter presentations, more networking time, ‘wow’ or unique experiences, and creating emotional, long-lasting connections.**

**STEVE BOVA**  
FICP Executive Director

and the association as a key player in the meetings and events industry.

“Growth allows FICP to increase the offerings we make available to both our community and the meetings and events industry as a whole, and ultimately increases the value that members derive,” Robinson says. He was specifically referring to a new recorded webcast series available through FICP Anytime, a podcast series focused on FICP’s Pulse Surveys, quick-hit videos from popular presenters, called FICP Shorts, and blogs written by experts across our community.

Robinson also announced the launch of another new resource: Shared Interest Groups (SIGs). FICP meetings professional members can now join moderated communities to share insights with each other on topics such as event disruption, meeting trends and current challenges. The SIGs will host virtual exchanges, limited to 25 participants per session, where members can discuss these topics in greater detail.

Finally, Robinson announced the launch of a simplified member referral

program to help recognize member and hospitality partner efforts to bring new people into the FICP community.

Beginning January 1, 2020, Robinson will become immediate past chair and lead the 2020 Annual Conference Event Team, and Michael Burke, CMP, will become FICP's chairman. Burke serves as director, Conference & Travel Services with The Hanover Insurance Group. "I am both extremely grateful for and humbled by the opportunity to lead the organization for a second time as your chair. FICP has been the single biggest influence in my professional career, and I am excited to bring my passion for the industry and this organization to my leadership role next year," Burke told the FICP audience.

He illustrated the growth FICP has experienced since he was last the association's chief elected officer 2005:

- Meetings professional membership has nearly doubled in size and the number of hospitality partners has grown by about 150%.

- The association has grown from having no financial reserves to having net assets that meet best practices for association reserves.

- FICP now provides year-round education and networking opportunities.

- The association has continued to evolve and expand its in-person events, with a successful Symposia model and the new Strategic Leaders Event.

- Finally, FICP regularly produces and collaborates with industry partners on research that helps members demonstrate their impact and value at their company.

**Q: In your opinion, what are the biggest new trends for financial and insurance industry meetings in 2020?**

**A:** Another trend from the most recent Pulse Survey is that planners generally prefer to do their own negotiating. In fact, 79% of planners say they are sourcing, which directly speaks to FICP's power of partnerships and relationships.

While anecdotally, it is assumed that meetings professionals use negotiation to demonstrate value, 78% of Pulse Survey respondents indicated they prefer to receive the best rate up front, while 61% of hospitality partners indicated they prefer to provide the best rate up front.



PHOTO BY ANTHONY JOHNSON / COURTESY OF FICP

FICP created Meeting Spots in an effort to customize and maximize interaction between meetings professionals and hospitality partners.

At the recent IMEX America SMART Monday session, the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence (SITE), Incentive Research Foundation (IRF), and FICP, along with research partner Oxford Economics, released the second joint study of the global incentive travel industry. The 2019 Incentive Travel Industry Index is the largest-ever survey undertaken into the incentive travel industry, providing not just a historical snapshot of from where the industry has come, but also a predictive hypothesis of where it's going.

In a panel session at the 2019 FICP Annual Conference, FICP members discussed the findings and how both meetings professionals and hospitality partners could leverage the data in executive-level discussions and for future incentive planning purposes. Key findings from the study included:

- An average spend per person on incentive programs of \$4,508 in North America.

- An anticipated budget growth by 2022 of 5.9%, primarily due to increases in hotel-related spends. While overall budgets remain relatively flat according to other industry data, incentive travel budgets are growing.

- An increased emphasis on 'soft power,' even with senior management, four of the six top-rated benefits to companies of incentive travel were tied to areas such as improved engagement, improved retention, better employee relationship building and

better relationship building between employees and management.

- Continued increased importance of wellness and CSR vs. golf, and flexible activities vs. mandated events in incentive travel importance.

**Q: How has technology impacted the financial and insurance industry meetings and what do you expect 2020 to hold in terms of the use of technology to enhance meetings?**

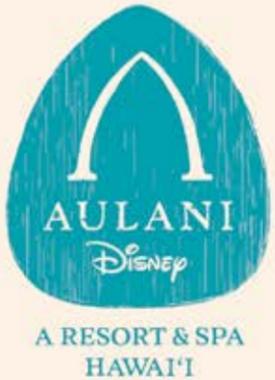
**A:** Technology becomes more savvy over the years. It's important for meeting professionals to follow these trends and make sure they are applying them to their programs. There is a lot to monitor, including mobile apps, facial recognition, traffic patterns and other innovative opportunities.

Finally, FICP announced that its 2022 Annual Conference will take place November 13-16 at the Omni Boston Hotel at the Seaport in Boston. The hotel, set to open in early 2021, is the largest hotel development in Boston in more than 10 years.

While the Annual Conference is the one time we can get together during the year, the key to meeting professional's growth is to be engaged throughout the year in their industry and the association — to stay on top of trends and innovations, productivity-boosting tips and other skill-building information and to build a pipeline of future leaders. **I&MM**

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**Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa**, will make powerful connections with your attendees. It's a celebration of Hawaiian culture, history and tradition that's the perfect location for meetings and incentives. Set on the pristine western coastline of O'ahu on the beautiful beaches of Ko Olina, this 21-acre oceanfront resort offers more than 76,000 square feet of stunning outdoor venues and a 21,000 square foot conference center. And all of it — the space, the support and the programming — is fully customizable. Resort guests have the opportunity to enjoy KA WA'A, A Lū'au at Aulani Resort, to experience Hawaii's history and its deep cultural roots in canoe exploration combined with Disney's signature storytelling. Add to that the award-winning Laniwai Spa, diverse restaurant options and shopping, world-class Disney entertainment, Ko Olina Marina, an 18-hole championship golf course and the comfort of 832 rooms you've got everything you could want to create an unforgettable experience for your attendees.



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NA'AMAO ROOM	240 SQ FT
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21,258 SQ FT</b>

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KULA WAI	3,000 SQ FT
KA MAKA LANDING	16,000 SQ FT
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AULANI BEACH	20,000+* SQ FT
'AMA'AMA PATIO	4,869 SQ FT
KA WA'A LU'AU	21,800+ SQ FT
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76,685 SQ FT</b>

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# DESTINATIONS FOR ALL SEASONS

## THESE DESTINATIONS ARE SURE TO PLEASE, NO MATTER THE TIME OF YEAR

BY MAURA KELLER

When the snow starts falling and the temperature begins to plummet, many meeting planners' thoughts turn to warmer all-season destinations for upcoming meetings and events. Whether a group plans to stay closer to home or to venture to an exotic, faraway destination, there are options to bring warmth to attendees all year long.

Lauren Grech, CEO and co-founder of LLG Agency & LLG Events of New York City, and an adjunct professor at New York University, has planned events in various all-season locations, including Florida, California, Mexico, Aruba and the Caribbean.

Grech says destination events in these all-season locales are a great choice for clients who are more laid back with their event planning, as they often won't get to see the venue or destination beforehand, or meet all of their vendors in-person prior to the event.

"Planners and clients choosing a destination event should be adaptable, because there are a lot more factors involved, which might result in last-minute decisions or unforeseeable changes," Grech says. "It's also a great option for a more intimate meeting or event with select attendees, as you can limit the attendee count and increase the spend per attendee for a more exclusive experience overall."

If a meeting planner opts for a destination event, they need to be sure to do research or collaborate with a local resource or destination event planner who understands what it takes to budget for an event in a desired location

and in that corresponding currency, so they can allocate funds accordingly.

As Grech explains, the event criteria and logistics that it takes to execute an event in this area, include such things as: Sourcing a venue that has accessibility to a nearby airport or the transportation involved for the attendees; the design components that may be impacted by this locale, such as the availability of certain florals; and the strategies available for a rain date, or contingency plan in case something happens such as a natural disaster.

"I have planned, designed and executed destination events in many all-season destinations, in addition to conducting site visits and event evaluations in these locales: Mayakoba, Mexico; Newport Beach, California; the Virgin Islands; and even other, more far-flung sites such as Bora Bora,"

ence consultant and meeting planner at TSYS in Columbus, Georgia, selected Naples, Florida because the area offered a quaint downtown area, unique beach setting among the mangroves, and one-of-a-kind experiences. Likewise some of Florida's other 'big draws' include Palm Beach, Orlando, Fort Lauderdale and Miami — all of which offer ample opportunities to work and play.

"I chose the Naples Grande Beach Resort based upon the entire vibe the property emotes — the décor is impeccable, reflecting a modern sophistication, yet relaxed South Florida vibe," Driggers says. Set on 23 waterfront acres on Florida's Paradise Coast, Naples Grande Beach Resort boasts more than 83,000 sf of meeting and event space. The property's second floor ballroom underwent a multimillion-dollar renovation late last year, which included a



Naples Grande Beach Resort boasts more than 83,000 sf of meeting and event space.

Grech says. "The upside is that these locales offer the perfect opportunity to blend the event with memorable, bucket-list activities; unique, outdoor venues; or depending where you go, a special blend of new cultures."

### FLORIDA

Many venues in Florida cater directly to corporate meeting professionals to make their all-season meeting or event memorable. In fact, for many organizations, Florida has become synonymous with 'all things meetings'—thanks to its vast array of resorts, meeting venues, warm weather and amenities that keep attendees coming back.

When looking at beach destinations, Lauren Driggers, client experi-

brand-new design, digital signage and custom lighting.

According to Driggers, it's imperative to incorporate local elements whenever and wherever a meeting planner can — whether it's through food selection, activity options or attendee gifts. "Naples is so charming and offers it all — it's known for its high-end shopping, world-class culture and sophisticated dining scene, and offers unique activity options like Everglades airboat tours," Driggers says. "Events today must go beyond just the traditional creative components — you have to bring new and different ideas to the table for

everything from agenda formation to activities to audio-visual.”

Orlando is known for its theme parks, but for financial and insurance meeting attendees, Orlando is considered a top meeting destination — drawing corporate attendees from near and far. In fact, Orlando leads the pack for a variety of reasons, including affordability, accessibility, quality and variety of facilities, alongside the experiences attendees enjoy.

And when you think of U.S. banking and financial capitals, what comes to mind? For many, New York City, with its world-renowned Wall Street is paramount. For others, Charlotte, North Carolina is considered a financial mecca of sort, thanks to its Bank of America’s headquarters. But, venture further south and Miami’s Brickell neighborhood is an international banking center that offers the ideal locale for financial-based meetings and events.

Of course, the benefits of hosting meetings in Miami are endless; not only does it boast a broad variety of meeting spaces, but also offers venues in ideal proximity to areas that can be explored when business is done. From elegant venues in historic settings to beautiful, sun-drenched spots that welcome relaxation, Florida is an exceptional option for financial-based meetings or conventions of any size.

## CALIFORNIA

In the past two years alone, the meeting planners at Meetings Made Easy have booked advisory board meetings of 15 executives up to events for 3,000 attendees all over California. That’s one of the biggest draws of California — there are hotels and conven-



VISIT OAKLAND

Jack London Square in Oakland is a vibrant hub for outdoor recreation and events and the latest dining and entertainment options.

tion centers that can accommodate all budgets, program sizes and interests, from high-end corporate financial events to meetings and association programs with stricter budgets.

“There’s more to having a great meeting than great weather, but it definitely helps,” says Sarah Buchbinder, a meetings group broker at Meetings Made Easy in Middleton, New Jersey. “When you host your events in California everyone wants to attend. It’s a destination that comes prepackaged with its own hype, so you don’t have to work as hard to create the FOMO — people get excited, which drums up attendance. This is a huge benefit for events whose revenue is dependent on attendance.”

Plus it’s easy to add on shoulder activities for families. As Buchbinder explains, if people feel they can leverage their business event into a family event, they’re more likely to take the time away from home and the office. Areas such as Anaheim have perfect opportunities for dinners on their own in areas such as the Garden Walk in Anaheim or Universal City Walk in Los

Angeles. Logistically you can give your attendees lots of options while minimizing transportation spend.

It sounds cliché, but Buchbinder says meeting planners who have set their sights on California should think outside the box when it comes to activities. Here’s why: California is one of the best states as far as diversity of activities. Of course, in the north there is Oakland and San Francisco, and Napa, along with some of the best golf and wine cities. While Southern California is known for its beaches, surfing, celebrities and still more wineries.

People also forget you can ski in California. In the winter, you can have your sales conference in the morning in Huntington Beach, and you can be skiing at Big Bear in the afternoon.

“Since you’re in an all-season destination, make sure to highlight it,” Buchbinder says. How many ways can you incorporate the outdoors into your program? Besides having an outdoor sunset reception, can your team building be a scavenger hunt around the city? Can you do a walking foodie tour to sample some of the local cuisine? What about bringing your entire board meeting onto the beach and having all your guests barefoot in the sand?

Vanessa Loney, head of global planning at Blue Ribbon Events in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is currently planning a high-profile event to be held in 2020 in the San Francisco Bay area. It

Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa, can accommodate a gathering of all sizes thanks to the resort’s 76,000 sf of beautiful outdoor space and the 21,000-sf conference center.

is a multiday international conference attracting thousands of attendees from around the world.

“Having never been to San Francisco or Oakland prior to my event, I had no idea the Bay Area had so many unique venues with rooftop views of the bay,” Loney says. “With the weather being pretty consistent, you can enjoy the outdoor spaces with nothing more than a sweater or light jacket.”

Aside from outdoor venues and activities, with so many visitors frequenting the city, there are tons of amazing Michelin-starred restaurants and other top-notch food options — not to mention, Napa Valley and Sonoma are about an hour outside of the city, offering group excursion options.

“This destination has enough to please everyone in an incentive group, conference or any event,” Loney says. “Spend as much time utilizing outdoor spaces as you can. If you have a conference, consider having the exhibitors hall in an outdoor corridor or the welcome reception under the stars.”

## MEXICO

So what are some of the ‘must-see’ warm travel spots? All-inclusive meeting options in Mexico continue to be the leading request from many attendees. All-inclusive resorts offer an easy, no-worry experience with meals, beverages and activities all within the rate. And if attendees have children, there are a variety of activities to keep them busy.

Located between the Riviera Maya forest and the stunning waters of the Caribbean, Hotel Xcaret México, offers a wealth of meeting and event venues and amenities that will add to a sense of history and exclusiveness to any size event. From the hotel’s Convention Center to its Mexican Hacienda, as well as a wealth of multifunctional rooms and private beaches, Hotel Xcaret México is the preeminent all-season destination for meetings and events.

Barcelo Hotels & Resorts offers a vast array of different resort options throughout Mexico. From Los Cabos to the Maya Riviera to Puerto Vallarta, these hotels offer a variety of meeting packages, depending on the chosen locale. For instance, the Barcelo Puerto Vallarta boasts a convention center



Hotel Xcaret México has a nearly 13,000-sf Convention Center, and its Xpiral Room covers nearly 19,000 sf.

that can host up to 600 people, while the Barcelo Maya Grand Resort features 37 conference rooms, three theaters, and five business centers, allowing the hotel to host a variety of conferences, conventions or meetings in Mexico.

Although getting down to business may be the focus of a destination event in Mexico, financial and insurance attendees can also enjoy visiting Mexico’s Riviera Maya tourism district, just south of Cancun. Featured as a top winter, or anytime travel destination, this area has long been adored for its great value and ability to offer something for everyone. Attendees can explore ancient Mayan ruins, horseback ride through jungle mangroves, and snorkel

“There’s more to having a great meeting than great weather, but it definitely helps.”

SARAH BUCHBINDER  
Meetings Group Broker  
Meetings Made Easy



along the coastal shoreline. In addition, attendees can relax on the white-sand beaches, revel in the charming towns or play a round of golf on nearby championship courses.

Of course, no discussion of Mexico would be complete without highlighting Cancun, a premier diving and snorkeling destination, situated along exotic coral reefs. In Cancun, attendees

can explore the kaleidoscope of these multicolored gems. Delightful shopping, and sightseeing opportunities abound throughout this Mexican hot spot. Both Riviera Maya and Cancun are famous for their large-scale, all-inclusive resorts.

## HAWAII

While it may be more distant, Hawaii has long been a favorite warm winter destination for meeting planners who recognize that the beaches and culture of Hawaii make a fantastic backdrop for meetings and events of all types. In addition to volcanoes, waterfalls and beaches aplenty, Hawaii boasts historic sites and indigenous Hawaiians traditions just waiting to be experienced.

And while Hawaii offers a wealth of venue options, Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa, can accommodate gatherings of all sizes, thanks to the resort’s 76,000 sf of beautiful outdoor space and a 21,000-sf conference center.

With deluxe accommodations, Aulani exudes world-class Disney hospitality at every turn. Set on 21 stunning oceanfront acres along the coast of Oahu, the resort also includes world-class dining and catering options, as well as an award-winning spa to help

attendees relax after a day of meetings.

In the heart of Hawaii, Oahu is home to Hawaii's capital, Honolulu — where the island's art, culture and history come alive. The north side of Oahu features legendary beaches, charming surfside towns and tiny shops. Oahu's Waikiki region is considered the 'tropical Manhattan,' and is home to vibrant hot spots that keep attendees coming back for more.

Does the idea of hula dancing on pristine beaches or volcano-hiking through shrouded rainforests seem like perfect 'after meeting' activities to offer attendees? Then Maui may be the ideal

all-season destination for a group. As the second-largest island in this archipelago of volcanic landmasses, Maui features lush rainforests, eclectic small towns, world-class resorts and charming bed-and-breakfasts. Attendees can enjoy sailing expeditions through iridescent waters, engage in a thrilling drive to the small coastal village appropriately called 'Heavenly Hana', or immerse themselves in Hawaii's rich cultural history.

## ISLAND DESTINATIONS

The natural beauty of the Bahamas stretches far and wide — occupying more than 700 islands in the Atlantic Ocean. And while the majority of those islands are uninhabited, meeting and event planners can hone in on 29 islands in the Bahamas where golf courses, resorts and tropical pleasures abound.

Paradise Island is home to Atlantis, a luxurious destination for corporate and

adventurous travelers. The ballrooms gracing Atlantis' grounds can accommodate up to 4,000 resort guests and features the 50,000-sf Imperial Ballroom, with more than 40,000 sf of pre-function space. The conference center can host up to 4,000 attendees and boasts 30

“Bringing tourism to these resorts will actually help speed up the country's recovery by giving their economy that boost it needs during a crucial time.”

### LAUREN GRECH

CEO and Co-Founder, LLG Agency & LLG Events  
Adjunct Professor, New York University



breakout rooms, three boardrooms, and a large staging area. It also has a banquet kitchen equipped with additional pantries and state-of-the-art facilities for conventions, board meetings, annual events, or other memorable trips for groups of all sizes. Flexible group packages can be developed to provide the ultimate work and relaxation program.

Located in Nassau, Bahamas, Grand Hyatt Baha Mar is another favorite destination of meeting and event planners. Its Baha Mar Convention, Arts & Entertainment Center doubles as an art gallery, featuring original works from Bahamian artists. Grand Hyatt Baha Mar features 200,000 sf of state-of-the-art, indoor and outdoor spaces for meetings and events looking to add a true Bahamian feel to the experience. In addition, Grand Hyatt Baha Mar offers more than 30 dining options, including: KATSUYA by Starck, COMMONWEALTH and COSTA.

A bit more exotic, all-season destination resorts throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands, including St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, as well as Aruba, offer meeting and event packages that many companies find enticing. And as new developments pop up in these locales, the region's seasoned DMCs can help meeting and event planners find the ideal venue for a conference, meeting or event, while also orchestrating meaningful tours and activities to must-see attractions.

For attendees eager to explore the various islands that are playing host to their meeting or convention, the U.S.V.I. and Aruba offer a wealth of opportunities to explore this tropical paradise via off-road tours, horseback or on 4x4 vehicles.

## STEPS TO TAKE

Obviously one of the major draws for these all-season locations is the beautiful, sunny weather that accompanies the ocean breezes and tropical landscapes. However, as we've seen with recent hurricane activity, it's crucial that event professionals have strategies available for a rain date or contingency plan — in case something happens in the chosen destination such as a natural disaster.

Another thing that Grech says event planners should be aware of is that many of these locales can still host events, even if they've been hit by a recent hurricane.

“For example, some of the best-known resorts in the Bahamas' 700-islands chain, like Grand Hyatt Baha Mar, and Atlantis, remained unscathed by Hurricane Dorian — bringing tourism to these resorts will actually help speed up the country's recovery by giving their economy that boost it needs during a crucial time,” Grech says. “This brings an added element to a meeting or event as well, by making it philanthropic and purposeful to aid an area of natural beauty back to full capacity.”

I&FMM

Grand Hyatt Baha Mar features 200,000 sf of flexible indoor and outdoor meeting and event space. Its Baha Mar Convention, Arts & Entertainment Center, which doubles as an art gallery, encompasses 82,000 sf.



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Monday, December 9th, 2019

4:00 PM to 6:00 PM (2 hours)

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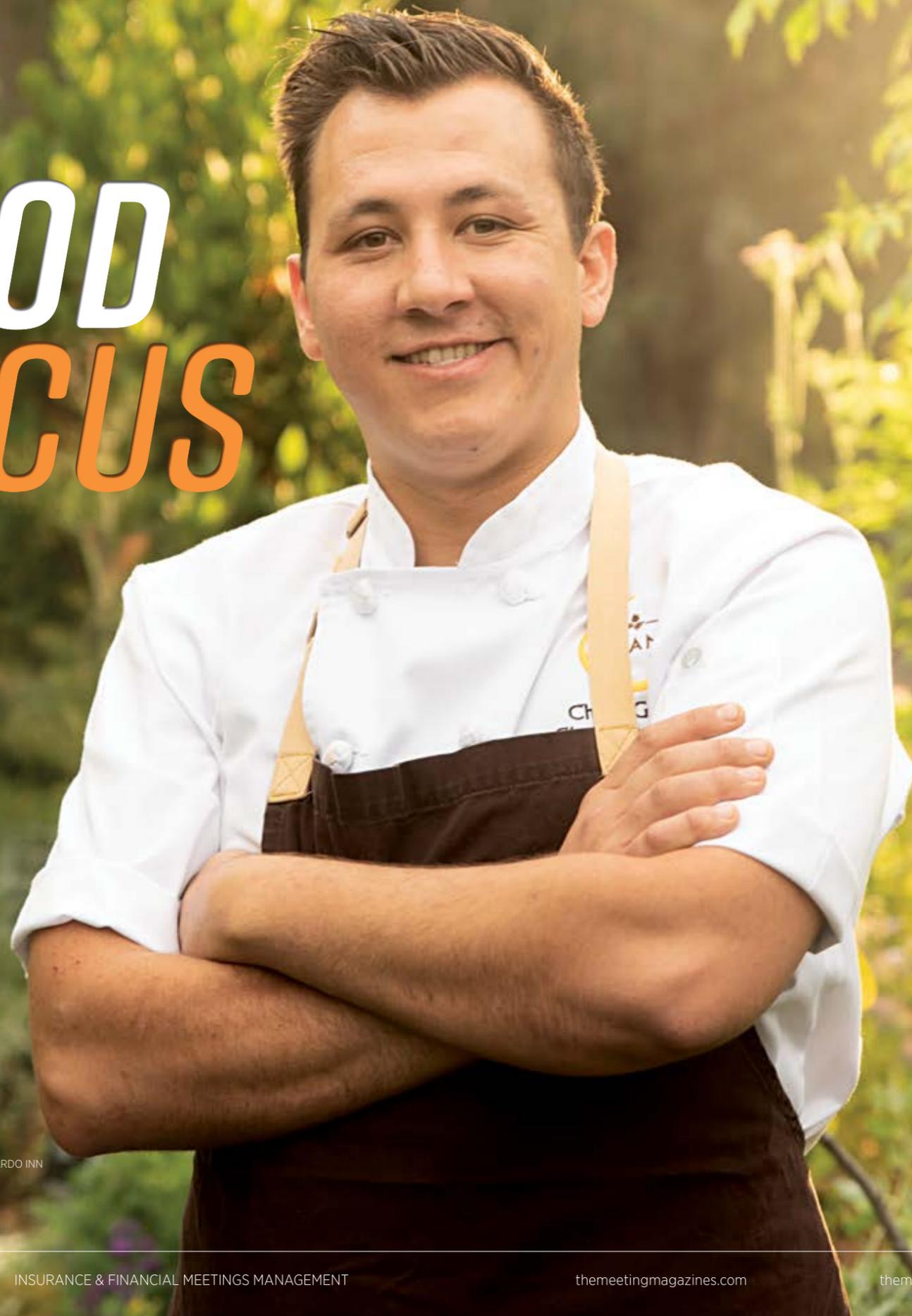
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RIVIERA MAYA

# FOOD FOCUS



Christopher Gentile, Chef de Cuisine for AVANT, at San Diego's Rancho Bernardo Inn, says chefs should "embrace a healthier cooking culture in all of our cuisine."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RANCHO BERNARDO INN

## THE INSIDE SCOOP ON THE FUTURE FOOD SCENE

BY CYNTHIA DIAL

**A**s in life, the only certainty in the world of meetings is — uncertainty. Change is inevitable and constant, even in the food arena. So, to be ahead of the culinary curve, keep reading for insight from in-the-know planners and gastronomic experts.

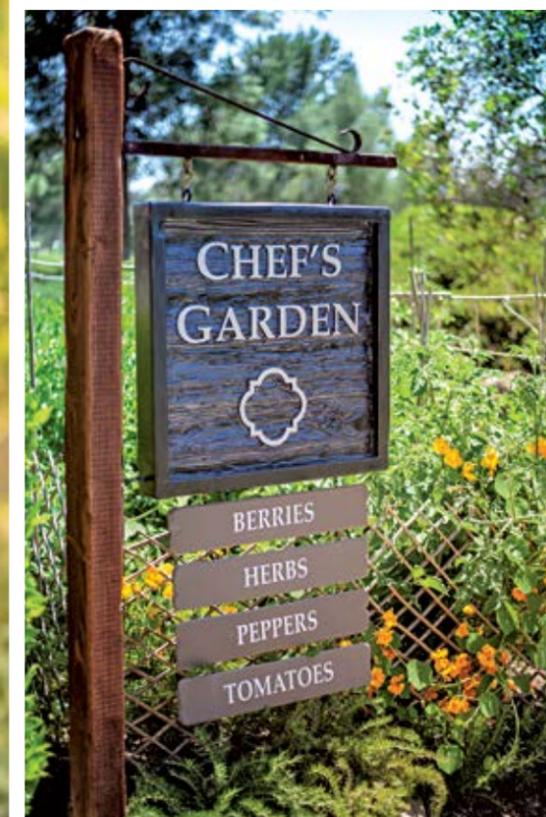
### 'IT' MARKS THE SPOT

What do turmeric, cauliflower, kombucha, fresh-pressed juices and milk alternatives have in common? According to Elise Kaiser, program manager with Bishop-McCann, LLC,

in Lincolnshire, Illinois, an industry leader in producing meetings, incentive programs and events worldwide, these food items are among the latest 'it' ingredients being incorporated into meeting menus.

It's a different world from those back-in-the-day, meat-and-potatoes meals, reluctantly accompanied by the sole vegetarian option of steamed vegetables. "Health trends are a huge component when selecting menus," Kaiser says. "I worked on a program with 200 attendees and there were over 15 different dietary restrictions in just that small group." As the planner strives to incorporate something for everyone, she's found an easy way to do this is by selecting menus that can be custom designed, giving attendees the freedom to select their own food options. "It's fun and allows them to be creative, but more importantly, it gives them a sense of security in knowing exactly what they're eating." The caveat, of course, relates to the pocketbook, as healthy, fresh food options are pricier — an important item to address with the client during budget review, which can translate to an additional \$5 to \$10 more per attendee.

But though it's no longer an exclusive steak-and-au-gratin audience, it's certainly not a healthy-all-the-time crowd either, as sometimes nostalgic, albeit heavier entrees can be found on today's menus, but now with a twist. Kaiser elaborates with an example. "Instead of the typical beef Sloppy Joes, coleslaw and tater tots, you might see turkey Sloppy Joes with gourmet mustard, local barbecue sauce and grilled onions, accompanied by a kale and cabbage slaw with cranberries, a citrus vinaigrette and sweet potato tots."



# BACK TO THE FUTURE

Life is not guaranteed by a crystal ball. But, if these eatery experts looked into a crystal ball, here's what they might see.

**Chef Christopher Gentile, Rancho Bernardo Inn:** "I think it will be a while before America jumps on the insect-eating train, but I hope to see more restaurants trying to push this amazing, sustainable and delicious protein."

**Elise Kaiser, Bishop-McCann:** "I wouldn't be surprised if we start to see cauliflower rice and mashed cauliflower show up on menus as alternative starch options." And she thinks we'll continue to see more plant-based protein/meat alternatives.



*Chef Joel Delmond*

**Chef Joel Delmond, Westin Mission Hills Golf Resort & Spa:** After citing trends from savory yogurt to the introduction of a combo of tastes such as sour/salty, sweet/spicy, making the experience more than 'just a meal,' the Rancho Mirage chef predicts, "Future food experiences will take attendees out of their comfort zones and be more diversified than ever before." More prognostications include grilling stations for the presentation of ethnic street foods and communal-style floor seating as opposed to table-and-chair dining.

**Chefs Alan Ehrich and Mark LeJeune, Audubon Nature Institute:** "The next food-oriented movement will most likely be one of convenience." The duo elaborates that anything that can be brought to the client on their terms and at their convenience will see an increase in days to come. **I&FMM**



PHOTO BY ANDY AUSTIN

Consider a salsa challenge as a team-building event involving food, suggests Vicki-Lynn M. Terpstra, senior marketing manager at PayneWest Insurance.

Know your audience, Kaiser urges. "Food diversity and global cuisine are extremely important, even more so with an international attendee base," she says. "They've flown hundreds of miles, sometimes thousands, just to attend a meeting and it's important to be aware of their cultural and religious backgrounds."

Kaiser admits that with so many fad diets out there, it's impossible to appeal to them all. "We once had someone list 'no fat' as a dietary restriction. We can't promise that, but we can make sure the menu has multiple salad options — serving the dressings, carbs and proteins on the side." With respect to the vegetarian crowd, Kaiser deems a salad insufficient. Her advice is to offer one or two hot, substantial entrees.

Lastly, she advises incorporating the destination into your menu. "If you travel to Mexico, for example, odds are the fresh ceviche, barbacoa tacos and homemade guacamole and salsa are a better bet than an Italian pasta station. Same for regional microbrews, spirits and wines. Sticking with the Mexico theme, a tequila and mezcal tasting at the welcome reception is a fun way to sample new things that attendees might not be able to experience in their hometowns."

## THINK SALSA

When just north of Mexico in San Antonio, consider a salsa-making competition, suggests Vicki-Lynn M.

Terpstra, senior marketing manager, at Billings, Montana-based PayneWest Insurance. Having selected this Texas city and the Hyatt Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa for the insurance company's Network Builder event in the past, the planner provides details of this group activity: "This was the first time we've created an entire, on-site foodie experience, which was due to our confidence in the resort's food and beverage team." Judged and guided by the resort's executive chef, who suggested such eclectic challenges as pairing salsa with sugar cookies, the planner deems this event at the top of her attendees' memories. "When we find good partners, like Hyatt properties, we go to them for the ideas. Let the masters do their craft."

'Local' is Terpstra's favorite trend. "We travel to different communities to be exposed to their regional cuisine. You don't have to be a foodie to appreciate the difference in meals found in every corner of our country." She elaborates that as this group is typically on property taking care of business, there is little time to venture off site. Thus, her remedy for infusing local culture into corporate meetings is to serve some of the region's noted dishes. Terpstra gives additional kudos to food demos where attendees are given the opportunity to learn cooking tricks and exclusive-to-the-area recipes.

Though plant-based proteins are



PAT GARIN PHOTOGRAPHY

At the Hilton New Orleans Riverside, king cake is among the sweet treats and other dishes unique to the flavor, character and culture of New Orleans.

universally popular these days, the reception of the PayneWest group for this movement has not been enthusiastic. However, the planner sees her attendees loving infused waters and their subsequent hydration, along with kombucha, quinoa and pickled veggies that have long been loved. "And as long as the masses love it, we will provide it," Terpstra says, adding that the industry's pairing of eco-friendly initiatives with healthy living has guided her and her company away from prepackaged foods toward fresher choices. "Fresh produce flies like hotcakes, and we are happy to pick options that offer a healthier meeting or event."

For a blast to the past, Terpstra gives a shout-out to nostalgic foods. "Again, we look at food as part of the fun and having stations of food that take us back to our childhood is an excellent way of providing added-value entertainment."

## LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL

"As our meeting is held annually in New Orleans, we try to incorporate the spirit of the city with our food and beverage choices," says Emily Coia, conference director for the New Orleans Investment Conference and COO of Metairie, Louisiana-based Jefferson Financial Inc., which has produced the conference for more than 45 years.

"This year we're offering mini

muffulettas, deviled eggs with crawfish tails, king cake and pralines. The closing session, at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside, is also food forward with the addition of an ahi poke station. Described as sushi-grade ahi, dynamite sauce, wasabi aioli, forbidden rice, seaweed salad, pickled ginger, furikake, ponzu and liquid nitro, this culinary combo checks the boxes of many of today's 'go-to' ingredients. And as we have done year after year, morning break stations feature hot beignets, the city's renowned French doughnuts — an everlasting favorite."

## BEYOND BEIGNETS

Executive Chef Alan Ehrich and Sous Chef Mark LeJeune, of the Audubon Nature Institute in New Orleans, elaborate on this city's distinctive food offerings and changes in today's epicurean landscape. "We are in southern Louisiana, and the majority of our menu reflects this," Ehrich says. However, the chefs expound on current trends, mentioning interest in Indian and Asian cuisines, anything vegan or vegetarian along with more green initiative-oriented menus — sustainability, farm to table, non-GMO and environmentally sound considerations.

With respect to the role of food as a connector, conversation starter and immersive experience, LeJeune says, "We find that the food does that on its own, but the family style

# WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

If you're troubled by the abundance of uneaten and discarded food associated with meeting events, you're in the majority, as six in 10 meeting planners cite its reduction as one of their top priorities according to the most recent annual IACC Meeting Room of the Future report.

"Food waste is a huge concern," says Bishop-McCann's Kaiser. Her advice: Inquire with the venue about its policies. Are they able to donate any untouched food to local shelters? If this is not an option, reduce your guarantee by 10% to 15%. Generally, the venue will automatically make 3% more than what you guarantee.



*Vicki-Lynn M. Terpstra, PayneWest Insurance*

"I've always tried my hardest to hold myself and my kitchen to a higher standard in reducing and repurposing waste," explains Rancho Bernardo Inn's Chef Gentile. How does Gentile do this? It starts at the creation of a menu. "If we want a piece of celery root to be square, it's cut square, but the scraps don't go to the trash. Sometimes we make entire dishes from what would be considered scraps."

Terpstra, with PayneWest, adds, "I think that portions have and will get smaller. However, we will see more flavorful creative dishes to make up for it." She says that when quality does not suffer, her team is very aware and appreciative of the efforts of properties to compost. **I&FMM**



COURTESY OF RANCHO BERNARDO INN

Gentile, of AVANT, at the Rancho Bernardo Inn, uses fresh herbs picked from the inn's garden.

format that most of our clients opt for certainly helps with group interaction. In addition, the creation of new and inventive items presented in an action station allows us to bring people together."

### FROM MIDDLE AMERICA TO THE MIDDLE EAST

Across the country, Joel Delmond, executive chef at The Westin Mission Hills Golf Resort & Spa in Rancho Mirage, California, gives a breakdown and the prognosis of food trends he sees. "Super foods, healthy fats and fermented and pickled foods will remain strong, as will kefir and fruits and vegetables. The introduction of coconut oil and grass-fed ghee will be incorporated into some menus/dishes, and provenance will become even more important." Among the far-from-standard 'it' ingredients for

this chef are aji chile, amchoor powder, black salt, mustard oil, a variety of dhals and hemp.

Delmond also takes cues from Israeli and Middle Eastern cuisines and their global influences, where plant-based foods and salads are common denominators. Among his favorites are hummus with dozens of toppings, Arabic, Bulgarian and Moroccan kebabs, Tunisian seafood, beef shashlik, beef shawarma, tahini shakes and such exotic spices as baharat.

### THE CULTURE OF 'HEALTHY'

At 20, Christopher Gentile, Chef de Cuisine for AVANT, the signature restaurant of San Diego's Rancho Bernardo Inn, California, made his way across the U.S., staging four different Michelin-starred restaurants, before ending his tour in California. Now a seasoned veteran at 29, he speaks from

experience. "I think one of the biggest and best pushes in the culinary world, as of late, is for more vegetable-focused and health-conscious dishes to appear on menus. And, I feel as a chef that instead of getting frustrated by the growing number of dietary-restricted diners, we should embrace a healthier cooking culture in all of our cuisine."

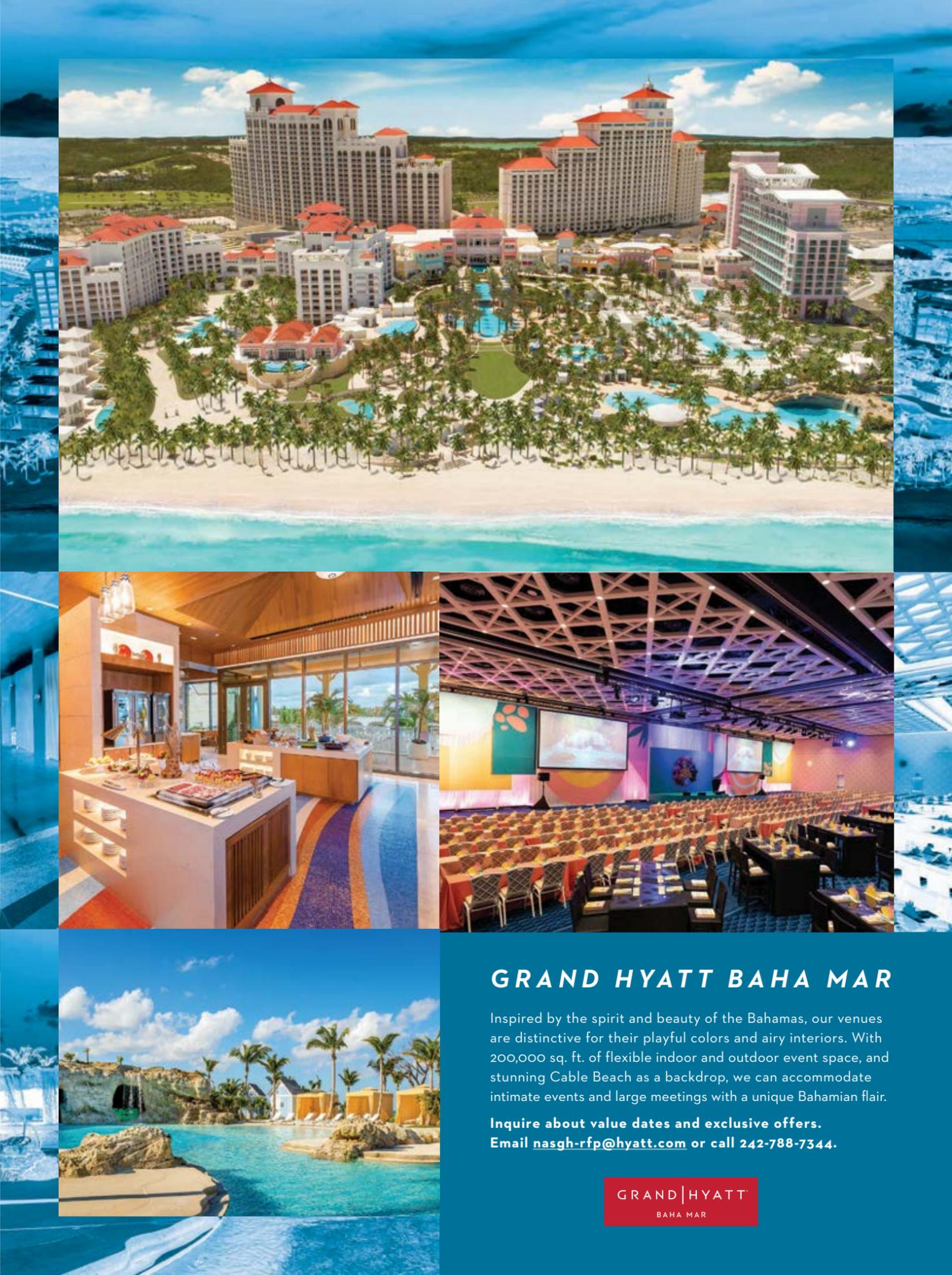
When asked what he considers today's 'it' ingredients, he responds: "Though I try to steer clear of 'it' ingredients and introduce diners to new and exciting experiences, I think in my circle of chef friends, we all have a sunchoke dish on our menus. In the past, ingredients like sunchoke were looked upon as a dish's starch component. Now the trend is to take what was typically considered a component and make it its own menu item."

With respect to the meat-substitute trend, however, he offers caution. "These aren't exactly healthier options when talking about imitation meats and cheeses. It frustrates me to see vegetarians and those on plant-based diets opting for ultra-processed meat substitutes full of chemicals. If you want the flavor and texture of beef or cheese, I think you're better off eating the real thing."

He concludes with wisdom delved from his galley — insight he shares with planners: "In my opinion, over the last five years the whole restaurant scene has begun to realize that these dietary restrictions and plant-based lifestyle choices aren't going anywhere. In order to be better chefs and restaurateurs, we need to adapt to the trends. As I've adapted, I've found myself cooking and thinking about food differently and in turn, have become healthier in and out of the kitchen."

Bon appétit!

I&FMM



## DRAW OUTSIDE THE LINES!

**W**hether incorporated into the décor or the presentation, any food event can be enhanced by creativity. So, tap your right-brain juices and have fun.

**Chef Christopher Gentile, Rancho Bernardo Inn:** "I've noticed a big trend of extra-large meat and cheese boards created directly on top of farm tables, with fewer plates and inedible garnishes. Food is beautiful and this makes it the focal point, as opposed to the plating or floral arrangements."

**Elise Kaiser, Bishop-McCann:** Consider a food wall — a

wooden wall with holes. "The servers stand behind the wall, with only their arms extended, and appetizers in each hand. The audience thinks it's a piece of art until the arms move. It's guaranteed to get a laugh from attendees."

**Chefs Alan Ehrich and Mark LeJeune, Audubon Nature Institute:** Inventive and creative presentations of the food are important as the food. The New Orleans chefs advise 'participation' of attendees. "The presentation of the food in a deconstructed manner allows diners to be interactive and involved in building the end product, aka their meal." I&FMM

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# CUT WITHOUT COMPROMISE

## Control Costs While Keeping the Value

BY CHRISTINE LOOMIS

DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM

**A**ny experienced meeting planner will tell you that no matter what budget you have to work with — large or modest — cutting costs is always top of mind. There's a reason that cost cutting repeatedly comes up in education sessions across the meetings industry. It's important, and planners are always devising creative ways to keep costs down while keeping the quality and value of the meeting experience up.

Darci M. Motta, CMP, CITE, CIS, senior conference manager with CSAA Insurance Group in Walnut Creek, California, says there are elements she always considers.

"The three primary meeting elements we look at in terms of cost savings are: destination/venue, food and beverage design and A/V design. We also educate our meeting hosts on how to be more budget-conscious in their meeting design decisions. For meetings that don't require accommodations and wouldn't leverage the added benefits of a hotel environment, we transition to conference centers or alternative meeting venues," she says. "Transitioning small day meetings to conference centers maintains a reasonable per-person price, while still including F&B and basic A/V. For local day meetings, we also innovate to leverage alternative venues such as indoor basketball courts, libraries and community centers."

For multiday and larger programs, she says, "We carefully consider the added value of a hotel. If our group will be in meetings all day, why send them to a resort, and pay for resort and other ancillary fees that won't benefit the attendees? Similarly, why host a meeting at a destination that experiences high transient business and charges accordingly, yet guests won't be able to fully enjoy? Thoughtfully matching programs with the appropriate venue is an eye-opener for our hosts, and opens the door for further cost-saving opportunities."

Motta says that once the appropriate destination/venue is identified, it's time to communicate with CSMs and A/V partners to make smart F&B and A/V design choices. "Narrowing buffet choices, asking the chef for alternative



DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM

Paying attention to the details in A/V expenses can save planners' budgets.

protein options that may help reduce per-person pricing, eliminating bottled water and transitioning to large-format water stations are just a few of our tactics."

Similarly, she says, "When reviewing A/V, we ask lots of questions to make sure we're down to 'need-to-haves' and not paying for 'nice-to-haves.' A simple example includes bringing our own slide-show remote controls instead of renting. When compounded over multiple meetings, this small attention to detail can pay big expense-management dividends."

The trick for planners is to be able to cut costs without compromising

"Thoughtfully matching programs with the appropriate venue is an eye-opener for our hosts."

**DARCI M. MOTTA, CMP, CITE, CIS**  
Senior Conference Manager  
CSAA Insurance Group



to best address their needs — without overspending — is where planners shine as strategic business partners."

When it comes to devising creative cost-cutting tactics, planners are highly skilled. But, sometimes tried-and-true is the best approach, and planners have to know which tactic works best in which situation.

"It may not be the most creative tactic as many planners leverage this approach, but finding out what preceding in-house groups planned for meals and A/V, and mirroring these choices can generate significant savings without sacrificing the experience. In fact, this can be a way to get more for even less than was originally budgeted," Motta notes.

Of course, negotiating is a critical skill for planners because negotiating can factor in multiple times before contracts are ever signed, particularly with vendors. "Be curious! Ask questions! Be transparent with your CSM about what portions of the buffet you absolutely need and what portions of the buffet you can compromise on," Motta advises. "It can only help to keep your budget tight. Share your agenda, and clearly articulate the time your attendees will be in meetings, then ask for a corresponding cost reduction on resort fees.

the equally important goal of creating successful, memorable meetings with value. Motta says it can be done.

"It's a balance; a planner can be cost conscious and create memorable experiences. It's really how we event professionals showcase our true worth and skill. Partnering with our hosts to identify the goals and objectives of their programs and guiding them through thoughtful choices to identify the location, environment and meeting design

## MORE COST-CUTTING TIPS



### ASK FOR SMALLER FOOD PORTIONS AND FEWER CHOICES AT MEALS.

Many people these days are health conscious or simply don't want a large plate full of food, especially mid-day.

### FORGET PLATED DESSERTS — MOST AREN'T EATEN ANYWAY.

Have a plate of cookies or small confections on the table or stations where guests choose a treat on the way out.

### DON'T DISCARD MUFFINS, FRUITS, NUTS AND OTHER ITEMS FROM BREAKFAST.

As long as they're still fresh and usable, have catering staff put them out for snack breaks.

### TELL CATERING STAFF NOT TO PRE-POUR BEVERAGES OR REFILL GLASSES UNLESS ASKED.

Not only is that cost effective, it eliminates waste. And if you're having more than one evening event on-site, ask the hotel to store your open bottles of wine until the next reception.

### CHECK AND RE-CHECK INVOICES.

Mistakes are not uncommon.

### USE OUTSIDE SUPPLIERS FOR A/V AND DÉCOR THAT MAY CHARGE LOWER FEES THAN THOSE AT THE HOTEL.

Be certain you understand cancellation and attrition clauses, and don't sign until you do.

### REQUEST SPONSORSHIPS TO OFFSET CERTAIN MEETING COSTS.

There are usually places where a sponsor's name and logo won't interfere with yours.

### NEGOTIATE, NEGOTIATE, NEGOTIATE.

I&FMM



DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM

Share historical data on outlet usage if it's impactful to help negotiate other program elements."

F&B is a major budget expense, especially in this day and age of multiple allergies, preferences and dietary requirements necessary for cultural reasons.

"First and foremost," Motta says, "you need to know your group. You need to know what the needs are so you're not trying solve for a demand that doesn't exist. Once you identify the actual needs of your group, engaging the chef in an honest and frank conversation can be very beneficial. We hosted a meeting with a theme of disruption and a scrappy, curious mindset. I approached the venue with the idea of reducing waste by showcasing 'imperfect' produce and using our F&B design to echo some of our atypical, thought-provoking themes."

Motta says she ended up lowering her overall spend for that meeting by empowering the chef to design menus that maximized the food choices while showcasing to the attendees an example of thinking differently. "The food still looked wonderful and tasted delicious, and this unorthodox approach reinforced the theme for attendees in an unexpected way. Additionally, our behind-the-scenes cost savings further reinforced the value of taking an unexpected approach to events."

When it comes to transportation, many planners are finding that costs can be cut by leveraging ride-share event codes. "Attendees want the flexibility to move how and when they want, and creating geo-fenced codes provides this flexibility, while ensuring the trips remain event-related," Motta says. "This is also an important consideration

A speaker's bureau can find out if there's a desirable keynote speaker who's already scheduled to be in town and could appear for a reduced fee.

when alcohol may be consumed. Ride-sharing event codes enable attendees to get home safely after a local event and are more cost effective than having to book a guest room."

As for speakers, it's always nice to imagine you can book that uber-popular celebrity — the one that comes with a hefty fee — but most expensive is not necessarily best. "It goes back to having a deep understanding of the goals and objectives of your program. You can often find a homegrown talent that provides a new and engaging perspective that won't break the bank. You can also check out local TEDx events, colleges and speaker series. Engage your C-suite and execs; they may have a connection at another company and an opportunity for a speaker swap may present itself."

If, however, a celebrity is important to the business or event, Motta advises following the mirroring approach suggested for menus and A/V. "By partnering with a speaker's bureau to find out if there's a desirable keynote speaker who's already scheduled to be in town, it may be possible to negotiate the speaker's longer stay for your event at a reduced fee."

Jennifer C. Squeglia, CMP, owner of Warwick, Rhode Island-based RLC Events, puts contract negotiations at the top of the list for cost savings. "Cost savings for a program start here with concessions; the larger your piece of business, the more concessions you can negotiate."

She has a long list of things that may be negotiable, including compli-

mentary guest room and meeting room Wi-Fi, resort fees and discounts on spa, F&B and A/V — typically at least 10%.

There are also complimentary suite upgrades, discounted staff rooms and discounted or complimentary parking. Even though urban hotels may not be able to offer a deal on parking, Squeglia says it's always worth asking. In addition, she suggests, "Ask for cumulative attrition and at least 20%, as well as one comp room per 40 utilized."

Complimentary meeting space with an F&B minimum can also be a negotiated cost savings. "There are times when I'll increase my F&B minimum if I know I can meet it to avoid room rental costs," she notes.

When it comes to planning the menus, Squeglia works closely with hotels to customize menus where possible, especially if she has budget limitations. And like Motta, she advises transparency.

"The budget doesn't have to necessarily be per meal," she points out. "You can work with the hotel to say that the budget is \$250 per person for all three meals and see what they come back with. If you work with the hotel closely, and are transparent with your budget parameters, they can partner with you to provide the best value for your budget."

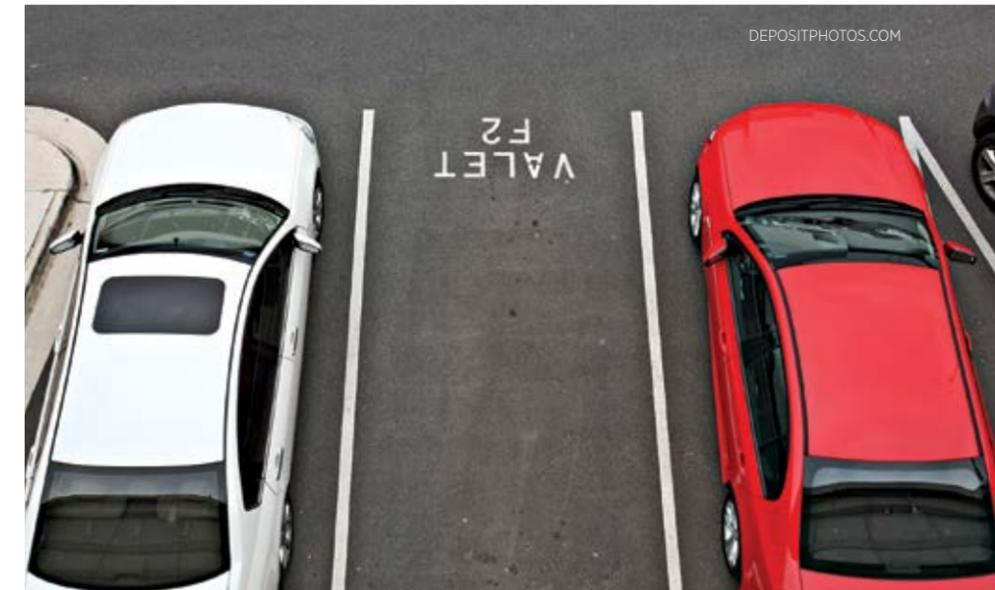
Décor also lends itself to cost savings. "It depends on the type of event you're planning," Squeglia says. "In some cases, the venue and/or hotels have very nice house linens and centerpieces that may help defray your décor expenses. If you're hosting a smaller dinner as part of a big program, using a private dining room in one of the hotel's restaurants may be less expensive and give your guests more food choices vs. having it in a smaller banquet room. Private dining rooms also typically need very little décor."

Squeglia points out that there are many small personal touches a planner can bring to a program that don't cost a lot of money. "I try to focus not only on the item, but also the experience and delivery. I planned a small incentive program and we did a 'flip-flop' interactive experience for opening night. We had branded flip-flops. Sizes were small, medium and large, so it was easy to guess sizes and have extras in a branded mesh bag, and people picked their size when they arrived at the party. We placed the flip-flops in a

branded beach bag, which we personalized with a name tag. As guests were leaving, we gave them the bag to take back to their room so they had a beach bag and flip-flops to use for the rest of the weekend. The total cost was about \$40 per couple. People loved it and it wasn't cost prohibitive."

Like Motta, Squeglia says that one of her best cost-cutting tactics isn't necessarily creative, but it's effective. "This may sound obvious, but I think the key to lowering costs is to pay attention to every detail on price, don't be afraid to question a cost or fee and ask for discounts. I also think being transparent about your budget expectations from the beginning is very helpful for both sides of the partnership, supplier and planner."

Transparency, in fact, comes into play throughout the planning process,



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as does communicating with respect. "It's a partnership," Squeglia emphasizes. "It's impossible for a planner to be successful without our hospitality colleagues, including DMCs, hotels, speaker bureaus and so on. A collaborative approach will always benefit you in all aspects, including managing costs."

Planning well ahead of time will also help. "It's so important to plan as much as you can in advance and anticipate situations as much as possible," Squeglia says. "When you have a lot of last-minute requests, that's when costs start adding up and you put yourself in a position that you have no choice but to pay the expense."

Squeglia also believes ride sharing is a good way to save on transportation costs. "I worked with a client on a large-scale broker forum. The total guest count was 350; 250 brokers and 100 internal employees. In planning the round-trip airport transfer, we arranged sedan service for the top company executives and brokers. For the internal employees, we set up a corporate account with Uber and it was a significant savings."

What happens when a planner really feels a larger budget is important? Is asking a client or CEO an option? That depends. "Your argument for a larger budget typically directly aligns with the goals and objectives of the meeting," Squeglia says. "If you can show the value of the additional expense and how it will enhance the

Though urban hotels may not be able to offer a deal on parking, it's always worth asking.

outcome of the program, most of the time it will get approved."

Most planners are in agreement when it comes to the top ways to cut costs without impacting quality. Like the planners above, one CMP and an FICP board member names A/V, meeting-room rentals and F&B among the areas to negotiate, and suggests that sustainability and cost savings align with choices such as eliminating bottled water and 'going green' with water stations.

“Meeting room rentals are generally negotiable with an F&B minimum and A/V is negotiable whether with the in-house provider or a third-party provider,” he says. “Food and beverage savings are possible if you’re agreeable to some flexibility in your menu selections — possibly by offering to overlap food requirements with another group or allowing the chef to make suggestions based on a certain price point”

In addition, he says, being flexible with dates can be a good way to save. “You’re often able to get lower rates if you have some flexibility around pattern or the ability to shift dates to fill a hole. Sometimes you may be able to negotiate additional concessions as well.”

As for keeping costs down while maintaining quality, he says, “I think planners just have to think a little bit differently and not get stuck in the ‘that’s how we’ve always done it’ rut. By doing many of the things mentioned above, they can still have a very successful program while reducing costs.”

As an example of thinking a little differently, he cites an upcoming event. “We’re doing a CSR activity at the event and our CR department is going to pay a portion of the expense because the activity ties in with their mission. It’s not a savings to the company but it’s allocating the expense across multiple cost centers so the impact to the meeting budget is not negative.”

Another creative tactic he used is related to an incentive dinner. “We gave each attendee a stipend to enjoy dinner at their leisure. It gave the attendees the freedom to customize what they were going to do, and it saved on décor and entertainment expenses. We provided a concierge-style service to assist in making arrangements as well as transportation to a central area in the city.”

“The larger your piece of business, the more concessions you can negotiate.”

**JENNIFER C. SQUEGLIA, CMP**  
Owner  
RLC Events



Another dining tactic: “When it comes to things like food stations, we guarantee based upon a number that’s lower than the full head count. Not every attendee is going to eat from every station, so it’s pretty safe to provide lower numbers on things like a crudité, seafood station; etc.”

Not surprisingly, he emphasizes that planning ahead is almost always best. “We plan far ahead for our incentive programs, more for availability than for cost savings, although planning further ahead can certainly have benefits from a cost perspective as well. Hotels are look-

ing to build a base of groups and then layer in their transient business, so there are benefits to being early in the booking window. Often times with smaller groups, however, hotels won’t take the business too far in advance as they don’t want to risk having to turn away a more profitable piece of business. In these cases, it’s sometimes more financially beneficial to book shorter term.”

Echoing the others, he notes that providing ride sharing is a good alternative to traditional group transportation. “For some of our internal meetings, we encourage the use of ride-share services. For others, we group arrivals together within a certain ‘window’ of time that we feel is reasonable, based on the location that they’re flying into. And utilization of airport properties helps eliminate the need for ground transportation for those meetings where easy in/out access is desired.”

Which speaker to choose is relative to the goals of the meeting, but he says there are some really great speakers who come at a lower price point.

“You sometimes have to pay a bit more if you’re looking for someone who has name recognition/cachet; however, even those higher-priced speaker fees are also negotiable. If you’re able to find speakers within the meeting destination, for example, they may be more agreeable to a lower fee because they can get in and out in the same day.”

As for asking for a larger budget, he says that, too, is possible. “Very often I’m successful if the ask is related to an expense that will enhance the program. It just needs to be presented properly.”

At the end of the day, he’s clear on his best advice to new planners on one important way to cut costs. “Don’t be afraid to ask/negotiate. Hotels are generally eager to earn the business and don’t want to lose out to a competitor.”

Bottom line: There are many ways to cut costs if planners are willing to negotiate, be transparent and think creatively — but keeping the goals of each meeting in mind is the framework for every decision. **T&FMM**

Since not every attendee is going to eat from every station, provide a guarantee based upon a number that’s lower than the full head count.



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# EMBRACING THE 'BIG EASY'

Jackson Square  
in New Orleans



## New Orleans Continues to Shine for Planners and Attendees

BY MAURA KELLER

**K**nown for its vibrant nightlife and idyllic music scene, New Orleans is also a beacon of sorts for meeting and events of all sizes. Lauren Caselli, owner of Bozeman, Montana-based Lauren Caselli Events, orchestrated a spectacular meeting in New Orleans for about 200 people during the off-season month of January.

In New Orleans, there are many activities that can be done — from active events to tours to food experiences. From a tour of the swamp to the floats for Mardi Gras, Caselli arranged for guests to enjoy a variety of local tours as well as amazingly fun activities.

“And we barely ever needed bus transportation. Our guests loved the option to walk from the hotel to bars, restaurants and activities. We had lots of surprises throughout the weekend, including a second line parade, even for corporate events. We did a second line parade, from our conference to an external lunch location, and people were amazed at how fun it was. They were greeted by the thunderous sounds of a 30- to 40-piece marching band. People had a blast, because it was so unique.”

‘Unique’ is the perfect word to describe a meeting or event in New Orleans. As one of America’s most authentic destinations, this Southern gem boasts a unique culture, world-



PAUL BROUSSARD / NEW ORLEANS & COMPANY

renowned cuisine and a 300-year-old way of life that inspires creativity and innovation.

“While the city prides itself on historic authenticity, New Orleans is making great strides to ensure cultural integrity as we continue to develop our assets into more modern and contemporary offerings,” says Stephanie Turner, vice president of convention sales and strategies at New Orleans & Company.

As Turner explains, hotels, including the Cambria New Orleans Downtown Warehouse District hotel, The Old No. 77 Hotel & Chandlery and The Eliza Jane hotel have adapted existing buildings and taken significant influence from their past to create a modern

The Mercedes-Benz Superdome dominates the skyline of New Orleans. The destination remains among the top places for planners to host conventions and events.

inspiration to your attendees,” Turner says. “New Orleans has a long-standing history of world-class venues, hotels and attractions, a walkable downtown and a rich culture that will inspire and energize the meeting experience for your attendees, exhibitors and stakeholders.”

### IDYLIC VENUE SELECTIONS

Unique settings are exactly what Crystal Irlandez, customer experience manager for Naperville, Illinois-based Infogix, was looking for when she recently planned her company’s annual customer leadership council event at the Omni Royal Orleans. At this event, Infogix hosts the company’s best customers, where they meet to share the company’s future roadmap, learn what customers’ needs are, and network and collaborate amongst their customer base.

“We always look for ‘city-esque’ locations. Our customers love what we have to offer in learning more about our company, but like to unwind after our sessions and explore the city they are in,” Irlandez says. “For many, they do not travel for work or personal pleasure, so it’s a nice way to see the city.

“New Orleans’ venues offer unique settings and the opportunity for unlimited creativity to bring local culture and inspiration to your attendees.”

#### STEPHANIE TURNER

Vice President of Convention Sales and Strategies  
New Orleans & Company



environment with historic context.

“This mentality extends to many of the city’s venues as well, including brand-new The Sazerac House as well as our long-standing partners like The Sugar Mill and The Chicory. New Orleans’ venues offer unique settings, and the opportunity for unlimited creativity to bring local culture and



PHOTO BY TODD COLEMAN / NEW ORLEANS & COMPANY

We liked that New Orleans was fun and had a lot of history, but is also a sought-after destination.”

When Irlandez was looking for a hotel, the location of the Omni Royal Orleans was ideal as the group was located right in the French Quarter and close to everything, but far enough that the rooms were quiet and not crowded. “We also liked the hotel’s private area for meeting space and cocktail receptions,” Irlandez says. Omni Royal Orleans’ 14,000 sf of flexible function space includes 17 meeting rooms and the 6,868-sf Grand Salon Complex.

Sarah Cale, program manager of the Pathways Project at the American Association of Community Colleges in Washington, D.C., also recently planned a three-day institute at the Omni Royal Orleans for approximately 120 community college presidents, administrators and faculty.

“New Orleans is a great location for the Southern region of the U.S. — easy to get in and out and so much to do and see,” Cale says. “The Omni Royal Orleans is beautiful and is conveniently located in the French Quarter. The rates were affordable and the food and service was outstanding.”

Also celebrating ‘all things New Orleans’ is the heart of The Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans. From innovative meetings that stir creativity, to the hotel’s ‘A Meeting of the Senses’ program that creates serene and relaxed meeting and event environments, the Ritz-Carlton crafts experiences that impact attend-

ees as well as the meeting planners. In addition to unique and unexpected food and beverage experiences, the Ritz-Carlton offers an ‘Oyster Butler’ and ‘Crawfish Concierge’ that teach attendees how to properly shuck oysters and peel crawfish.

Located in the historic Beaux Arts building in the French Quarter, the Ritz-Carlton, New Orleans offers a convenient location ideal for meetings, events and conferences, and offers more than 35,000 sf of space, including a grand ballroom that can accommodate more than 800 guests, two courtyards and an intimate Library Lounge.

Perhaps the most celebrated, glamorous hotel in New Orleans, The Roosevelt New Orleans, A Waldorf Astoria



PHOTO BY CHERYL GERBER / NEW ORLEANS & COMPANY

New Orleans is world-renowned for its unique celebrations — highlighted by Mardi Gras — and its distinct music, art, architecture, culture and delectable cuisine.

Hotel, has been playing host to a myriad of meetings and events for more than a century. From foreign leaders, to presidents, to global business leaders, The Roosevelt has housed a wealth of individuals who cherish the traditional, classic elements. The decadent interior offers 60,000 sf of meeting space, including interconnecting ballrooms, hosting from 800 to 1,200 attendees and 27 private meeting rooms.

In a city with world-renowned celebrations, distinct music, art and delectable cuisine, Hyatt Regency New Orleans is another premier hotel destination hosting some of the Crescent City’s most prestigious meetings and events. The hotel is in the heart of downtown and adjacent to the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, Smoothie King Center and Champions Square. This hotel features guest rooms with breathtaking city views, and 200,000 sf of event space — making it the largest hotel meeting and exhibition space in New Orleans. The hotel also offers contemporary and flexible function space that can be customized for small to large groups, with multiple ballrooms, breakout rooms and event space.

In addition, Hyatt Regency New Orleans’ culinary team and specialists work with meeting planners to fuse the best of New Orleans culture into each event — whether it’s spicing up a lunch with traditional creole cuisine or adding a three-piece jazz band for an authentic welcoming experience.

On Canal Street on the cusp of the historic French Quarter, the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel offers meeting planners more than 105,000 sf of flexible space for events up to 2,600. The hotel’s guest rooms feature floor-to-ceiling windows offering views of the French Quarter, Mississippi River and downtown.

In the heart of the French Quarter, Hotel Monteleone offers more than 25,000 sf of meeting space, with the capacity

to host events up to 400. Boasting more than 25 meeting rooms, the hotel offers every style of room — from theater seating to banquets to trade shows.

Irlandez recommends that for meeting planners considering New Orleans as a destination, they select a hotel that is near everything, but not in the middle of it.

“Noise and crowd control can make or break an event. Make sure that you like the staff of the hotel you are picking,” Irlandez says. “There is a lot of be said about their timeliness in answering your emails and being accommodating with requests.”

And that’s where Hilton New Orleans Riverside comes in. There’s something to be said for hosting an event in the warehouse and arts district of New Orleans. Located downtown, the hotel offers attendees a destination on the banks of the mighty Mississippi. With more than 130,000 sf of renovated meeting space, the Hilton New Orleans Riverside can accommodate a variety of meetings and events, in its dedicated Riverside Complex, which boasts additional guest rooms and amenities. A mere four blocks from the Canal Street shops and the French Quarter, attendees can engage in the favorite hot spots of New Orleans, while enjoying the quieter area of the warehouse and arts district of the city.

## NEW & IMPROVED DEVELOPMENTS

Within the last year, millions of dollars have been invested in infrastructure and riverfront developments. According to New Orleans & Company, among the most exciting projects is a \$60 million linear park development and transportation hub along Convention Center Boulevard, bringing dining, entertainment and retail to the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center (ENMCC) in the coming years. The ENMCC, with more than 1.1 million sf of exhibit space, is the sixth-largest convention facility in the nation. The facility already boasts thousands of sleeping rooms within walking distance and will soon offer a connected ‘headquarters’ hotel anchoring the upriver end of the building. The development of Convention Center Boulevard and the surrounding neigh-



PHOTO BY KATHY ANDERSON / NEW ORLEANS & COMPANY

borhood will bring unprecedented access to the area.

“The compact geographic footprint of New Orleans and improved amenities underway at ENMCC saves planners on transportation costs and logistics,” Turner says.

According to Turner, new hotels are in the pipeline throughout the downtown area, many with on-site meeting space and within walking distance of the ENMCC and other venues. New luxury properties include the recently opened Maison de la Luz and The Higgins Hotel New Orleans, Curio Collection by Hilton at The National World War II Museum. Additionally, The Four Seasons Hotel & Private Residences, Virgin Hotels New Orleans and a new Kimpton property are projected for completion in the coming years.

“For many, they do not travel for work or personal pleasure, so it’s a nice way to see the city.”

**CRYSTAL IRLANDEZ**  
Customer Experience Manager  
Infogix



“Soon, New Orleans will have a completely new world-class airport terminal, a variety of new luxury hotel brands — including the Four Seasons and a convention center headquarters hotel, both overlooking the Mississippi River — with more than 5,000 rooms in the pipeline, plus a new entertainment district surrounding the convention

The Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, with more than 1.1 million sf of exhibit space, is the sixth-largest convention facility in the nation.

center with new shopping, dining and venue opportunities,” Turner says. New Orleans will also soon to be home to one of the largest continuous public riverfronts on the Mississippi River, allowing visitors and locals alike to enjoy its natural beauty.

“All of this lives within a walkable, 2-mile area,” Turner says. “The city is reimagining many of our cultural and infrastructure offerings, joining the old with the new to present a completely new meetings experience.”

And for those looking to host an event at an unusual locale in New Orleans, consider the Riverboat Louis Armstrong. One of the largest riverboats in the area, the vessel holds 3,000 passengers and pays homage to the legacy of New Orleans’ most beloved musicians, Louis Armstrong. Having undergone renovations, the upgraded vessel offers private event rentals, VIP experiences and a gospel jazz brunch on Sundays.

To further celebrate New Orleans’s much-adored music scene, a new premier live music venue at Harrah’s New Orleans recently opened. Located inside the casino, the 2,200-capacity venue will feature memorable live concert experiences for visitors. In addition, the 22,000-sf venue can accommodate events of various sizes and types — including seated dinners, live concerts or VIP experiences.

## RENOVATED CONVENTION CENTER

The ENMCC has been freshly renovated, offering the quintessential conference center experience, complete with New Orleans' vibes and elements throughout, including traditional New Orleans' cuisine, old-time jazz music and a wealth of entertainment elements to make the center a culturally rich destination.

The convention center recently embarked on a \$557 million, five-year modernization plan that will transform the attendee experience, including reimagined meeting rooms, restrooms and public spaces. It consistently ranks in the country's top 10 of facilities that hold the most conventions and trade shows annually. Just steps away from the convention center, attendees can enjoy the world-famous French Quarter.

Adjacent to the convention center, the Hyatt Place New Orleans/Convention Center is close to the Mississippi Riverwalk. The hotel offers an all-inclusive meeting package that includes room rental, food and beverage, as well as audio-visual needs and is the ideal location for those visiting the convention center.

## ACTIVITIES APLENTY

For those meeting planners who want to integrate play as well as work into a meeting, New Orleans offers something for everyone. Famous for its nightlife,



PHOTO BY ERIKA GOLDRING / NEW ORLEANS & COMPANY

The 800-passenger Paddlewheeler Creole Queen, along with the 3,000-passenger Riverboat Louis Armstrong, offer group excursions along the Mississippi River.

music scene and shopping, New Orleans is teeming with historic gems and contemporary cultural experiences. Dating back to 1718, the city's French Quarter is the oldest neighborhood and is steeped in history and heritage. Home to awe-inspiring historic buildings, cathedrals and famous jazz clubs, the French Quarter is a 'must see' attraction.

The area's historic Garden District is also sure to please. This famous neighborhood is home to immaculate gardens, preserved antebellum mansions, renowned Lafayette Cemetery No. 1, and tree-lined streets.

Of course, New Orleans has long been synonymous with Mardi Gras, which happens every Carnival season starting Twelfth Night on January 6 and culminating on Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday. If meeting

or event attendees visit New Orleans at a time other than the designated time of Mardi Gras, they can visit one of the Mardi Gras-centric museums and workshops and see where floats are stored, lavish costumes are on display and Mardi Gras Indians are celebrated.

And because New Orleans is located below sea level, its well known above ground cemeteries are both historic and beautiful. Elaborate marble chambers grace these sacred grounds and visitors can enjoy guided tours or explore on their own.

The majority of New Orleans cherished attractions are within walking distance of the city's downtown and convention districts, as well as the French quarter — offering attendees the opportunity to wander amid this historic area and revel in its charm.

And for those visiting New Orleans with their family in tow, the new Louisiana Children's museum in New Orleans City Park recently opened its state-of-the-art facility. Situated in the heart of City Park, this \$47.5 million facility features interactive educational exhibits, an expansive, mighty Mississippi water exhibit, literacy center, and outdoor amenities including decks, bridges, edible gardens, a floating classroom and interpretive wetlands. **I&FMM**

New Orleans has festivals and events year-round. Attendees are sure to find something to do to unwind after a long day of meetings or other activities no matter which time of year they visit the city.



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# Fantastic FLORIDA



The Ritz-Carlton, Naples

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## Everything From Sandy Beaches to Thrilling Theme Parks

BY DAVID SWANSON

If America's first visitors was the crew helmed by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León in 1513, then it could be said that Florida has been playing host for longer than any other state. While the explorer didn't venture far beyond the swaying palms and silken sands lining the coast, the visitor infrastructure that followed in his wake has blossomed — particularly for meeting and incentive groups.

Today's 'Sunshine State' avails an impressive variety of backdrops — awesome or intimate, and locations ranging from sleepy to downright buzzy — truly something for almost every style of gathering and budgetary consideration. And when it's time for a breather, meeting planners will find Florida replete with water sports options and theme parks, beachcombing and wildlife viewing, along with a climate that invites alfresco events year-round.

"What's great about Florida is the wide variety of options," says Angie Nelson, regional vice president, Southeast, for event management firm PRA. The office is in Oakland Park, Florida. "It all depends on the experience you want to offer your attendees. You have city options where you're not on the beach, but it's nearby. You have the main convention destinations; and then there are the smaller, more incentive-oriented beach resorts."

Nelson adds: "A lot of our clients alternate West Coast and East Coast every year, and that's OK. But in Florida you could pick a different destination each time and go for multiple years in a row."

And a variety of options was what was needed for a partner retreat PRA handled recently on behalf of a financial industry client. Attendees had a choice of about 20 different destina-

tion around the country, including six in Florida — more than any other state. The options, which drew an average of 300 guests each, included Palm Beach, Naples, Amelia Island, Key Biscayne, Miami's South Beach and Orlando.

"The client chose Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando for their family program," Nelson says. "They wanted to capitalize on the city for the theme parks."

Located adjacent to the Universal Studios Florida entrance, the 750-room

"You know what you're going to get in Orlando — you're going to lose people to the parks," Nelson suggests. "For the adults-only destinations, they chose beach properties around the state that offered both meeting space and relaxation. Florida was ideal for this as the airlift is generally affordable and there are plenty of direct flights, even for the smaller destinations."

In Miami, the client chose the 1 Hotel South Beach, a beachfront property that incorporates art and sustainability into



PHOTO COURTESY ANGIE NELSON

Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando features 42,000 sf of meeting space, including the 15,000-sf Tuscan Ballroom.

Portofino Bay emulates its namesake Italian seaside town, replete with cypress trees, cobblestone streets and gelato stands. The hotel features 42,000 sf of meeting space, including the 15,000-sf Tuscan Ballroom. But events like the one Nelson handled are all about the theme parks, and guests staying at Portofino Bay get a leg up with early park admission to The Wizarding World of Harry Potter and select attractions at Universal's Volcano Bay water park.

its upscale offerings. More subdued than some South Beach spots, the hotel's unique indoor and outdoor event spaces include a rooftop pool deck, a private beach club and a 6,500-sf ballroom with a 20-foot green wall of living moss.

Three Ritz-Carlton hotels pampered the financial client's attendees

Florida offers a variety of resorts, such as the Ritz-Carlton, Naples, top; year-round activities such as golf; and meeting facilities such as the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, bottom.

at Amelia Island, Key Biscayne and Naples.

“These might not be the biggest cities, but they’re really pretty destinations with great beachfront hotels,” Nelson says. A priority for the client was cities that had a range of activities within 20 minutes of the hotel. “Restaurants for dine-arounds, unique venues for an off-site dinner event, and local tours needed to be ample in order to entertain the attendees during the program.”

The Ritz-Carlton, Naples is a distinguished luxury landing that includes a spa with 30 treatment rooms and two pools, one of which is designated for adults only. The hotel features more than 42,000 sf of indoor and outdoor meeting space, including a 10,140-sf ballroom.

For one evening dinner the client opted to take the group to NGALA Wildlife Preserve. Located 30 minutes from The Ritz-Carlton, Naples, the 42-acre animal reserve is a passion project for Donovan Smith, sheltering animals in need that either cannot be released into the wild or are not accepted at traditional zoos. The facility can host groups of up to 1,200 for dinners and animal interactions.

“The owner of NGALA goes above and beyond to welcome guests and tell the stories of the animals to which he has taken in his care at the refuge,” Nelson explains. “It’s not a zoo that’s highly publicized — you would never know it existed. You have to know exactly the gate to turn at.”

She continues: “The guests were able to interact with giraffes, owls and other exotic animals while dining al fresco in a tent replicating an African Safari destination. This



COURTESY PHOTO



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COURTESY PHOTO

particular client is very health conscious, so the off-premise catering team was able to create a unique menu with healthy options that were indicative of being in Africa tailoring to a unique flavor profile. There was unique entertainment throughout the night and then story-telling around a fire pit capped off the experience.”

One challenge Nelson faced in Naples was accommodating the client’s requirement for off-site dine-arounds at local, rather than chain restaurants.

“In post-event client surveys events, we sometimes get negative feedback about staying in a hotel the whole time and not being able to explore the destination,” Nelson says. “A lot of our clients want to send groups outside, and with general sessions and other events, evening is usually the best time to send them out in groups of 30 to 40. But clients also want local flavor, and they look for local restaurateurs to provide attendees unique experiences that they cannot get anywhere else, a place you can’t go to when you’re at home.”

Nelson adds: “Naples has a selection of local favorites, but they’re either pretty small or they don’t have a private room. Only the big-name chains seem to have the flexibility and space for group dining.” Nationally known venues such as Tommy Bahamas and Roy’s had the private space Nelson needed, along with quality dining, but it represented a compromise for the group.

The sixth destination Nelson’s client used was Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa.

“The resort is centrally located between the Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale airports, so a wide variety of flight options is available,” Nelson says. “It sits on pristine beaches, where guests can rub elbows with the rich and famous of Palm Beach while enjoying the laid-back nature of the destination.”



COURTESY PHOTOS

Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa last year completed a face-lift for its 30,000 sf of meeting and event space. The upgrades included state-of-the-art LED lighting, a new sound system and electronic reader boards. The resort also features a 42,000-sf spa, a fitness center and oceanfront cabanas.

Ken Allen, vice president, Investment Research for Prudential Financial’s annuity business in South Palm Beach, Florida, was equally effusive about this location. Allen has held a three-day, quarterly mutual fund board meeting here several times annually in past years. “I’ve been associated with this board for about 10 years, and early on we held our meetings where our managers were,” Allen says. “We had individuals coming from Connecticut, New Jersey, Illinois and a couple other places, and during winter we kept running into flight delays. About six years ago we decided to move our meetings to Florida. We started out in Fort Lauderdale, but unfortunately it wasn’t the best service experience that we would have hoped for — so we looked at other options.”

He continues: “One of our meeting planners did an extensive search, from Miami up to West Palm Beach, and all the big brands were looked at — The Breakers, Ritz-Carlton, and Four Seasons. She got in contact with Eau Palm Beach and was blown away by the level of service she received. We started with one or two meetings, then moved it to three each year. When you put the complete package together — service, price and location — Eau Palm Beach is truly spectacular.”

The resort’s accommodations and common areas are designed with a ‘joie de vivre’ that enlivens, rather than settling for tired resort clichés. Last year Eau Palm Beach completed a face-lift for its 30,000 sf of meeting and event space. The upgrades included state-of-the-art LED lighting, a new sound system and electronic reader boards.

“We definitely need to be able to hold 50-plus people for our meetings,” Allen says. “They have multiple options for meeting rooms, some with beautiful

features a 42,000-sf spa, which Allen says many of the spouses attending will utilize, stressing the level of service his attendees receive.

“Eau Palm Beach has set itself apart,” he explains. “They treat you like family. On the last day of our meeting, when there are issues up north with weather, they are extremely accommodating with an extra night, or late checkout. Any of the managers who comes to one of our meetings for the first time, comes away saying it’s a completely different experience. They deal with a lot of our competitors with the same type of meetings, and their impression of this one is absolutely favorable. After the fact, a lot of these people come down to Eau Palm Beach on vacation.”

Allen closes by paying the ultimate compliment to the resort.

“I liked it so much for the meetings that I ended up vacationing there at least a couple times a year,” he says. “Then, my wife and I ended up buying a place just a half-mile up the beach.”

For most meeting planners, Florida’s major event destination lies in the center of the state, and Orlando has been ranked by Cvent as the number one destination for meetings and events in the U.S. for the last five years in a row. Orlando hums along with 265

“What’s great about Florida is the wide variety of options. It all depends on the experience you want to offer your attendees.”

**ANGIE NELSON**  
Regional Vice President, Southeast  
PRA



views of the water. Barbara Rodriguez at the resort works with our meeting planner, and she has been a part of these meetings going back five years. There’s been seamless execution, and all of our meetings are extraordinarily well run. She’s phenomenal.”

Allen says Eau Palm Beach’s dining has been “consistently excellent. They have four different dining options, and they are all superb.” And the resort

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate next year will undergo a complete renovation of all 720 guest rooms and work on the public and private meeting spaces.

meeting hotels and the Orange County Convention Center (OCCC) — the second-largest convention center in the U.S. — offering more than 7 million sf of meeting and exhibition space.

Additions, expansions and renovations in this fast-growing city are always in the works, and among the most notable this year is the summer opening of the new, 15-story Gran Destino Tower at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort. The 545-room tower brings the Spanish-themed location to 2,416 rooms, and adds a 24-seat boardroom to the existing 220,000 sf of meeting and event space already available. The meeting room, Lantana, is equipped with monitors, a foyer space for networking and semiprivate patio. Among the new dining options is Tolédo, a rooftop table-service restaurant featuring Spanish-inspired tapas, steak and seafood. The venue includes three private dining rooms offering views of the Walt Disney World property.

Nearby, at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort, a 14-story addition is under construction, next to the Swan Resort on the site of the former tennis courts. The expansion, to be completed in 2021, will include 349 new guest rooms and suites, more than 22,000 sf of meeting space, including two ballrooms, and a rooftop reception space offering spectacular views of the nightly Walt Disney World fireworks, and other amenities.

Next summer, the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate, located 28 miles southwest of the Orlando International Airport, will undergo a complete renovation of all 720 guest rooms. Updates will include furnishings and re-carpeting of the meeting and public spaces of the main resort is also planned. Projected to be completed by the end of this year is a renovation of the resort lobby and David's Club, known for bourbons, craft cocktails and prime cuts.

Not every gathering planned for insurance and financial institutions involves a lavish budget, and for



COURTESY PHOTO

Danielle Welsh, meeting and event planner for a Fortune 100 financial services firm, the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando Airport filled the bill for an 80-attendee general managers meeting.

"Although many steer away from airport properties, it is worth taking a look at them for smaller budget meetings," Welsh says. "And, as the only group in the hotel, we were the 'big

"Although many steer away from airport properties, it is worth taking a look at them for smaller budget meetings."

**DANIELLE WELSH**  
Meeting and Event Planner for a Fortune 100  
Financial Services Firm



fish' — which is not the norm when you select a large, big-box property. The pricing was very competitive and the property has a fantastic staff and A/V team."

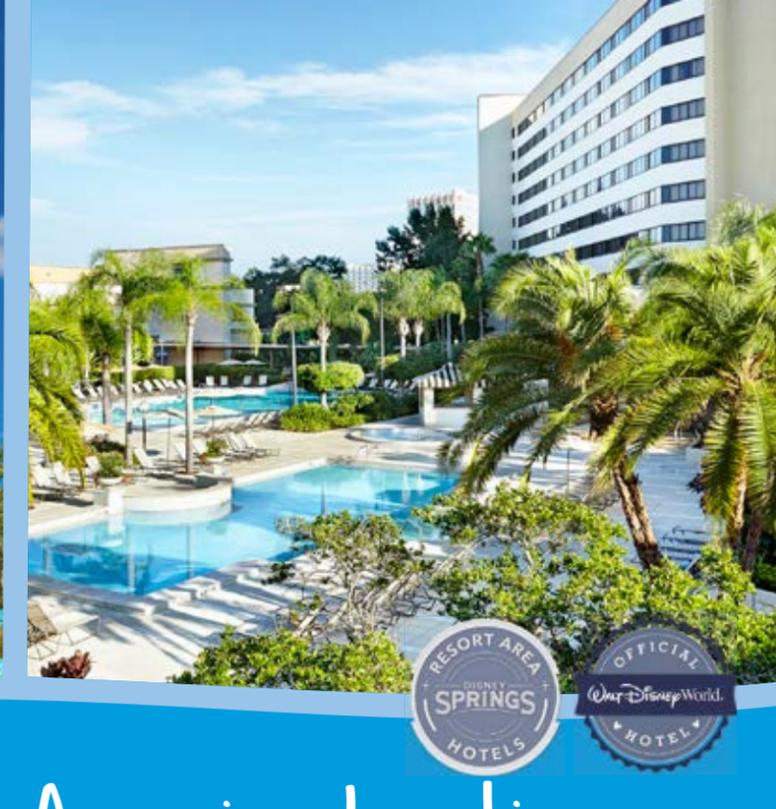
The DoubleTree, which was renovated this year, has a 7,350-sf ballroom, along with eight breakout rooms and five boardrooms providing an additional 9,500 sf of flexible conference and pre-function space. The hotel is located less than 10 minutes from the airport, amid a cluster of other smaller hotels and chain restaurants, and

shuttles provide free transportation from the airport.

Welsh says the DoubleTree accommodated many agenda changes during the meeting. "Their team rolled with the punches. Our group tends to go back and forth with their wants and needs, and the hotel accommodated all that they could to make our client happy. The catering was great, as we often request to customize existing breaks to enhance or ensure all dietary restrictions are observed. The in-house A/V team was very cost effective, which is a huge surprise in this industry — it was one of the best experiences we have had with an A/V team."

Despite the airport location, off-site activities are plentiful. "A group could meet here for multiple events and not repeat an activity for attendees," Welsh says. "We had a casual dine-around at Universal CityWalk. Even though the attendees did not have access to the rides, it was exciting for them to get a quick park experience."

Buffeted by year-round sunshine, Florida's diversity of settings, attractions, resorts and world-class convention facilities, along with solid air access, make the state a clear leader for meetings and conferences. As these planners can attest, the only problem might be deciding where to land. **I&MM**



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# 2019 World Class Award

## 21<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL WORLD CLASS AWARD WINNERS

**W**e honor the deserving winners of the 2019 World Class Awards with this special section devoted to the hardworking staff of the best of the best — the convention and visitors bureaus, and hotels, resorts and conference centers. The high

standards for convention and visitors bureaus include these criteria: superior service and support and promotional assistance. For hotels, resorts and conference centers, the criteria include: superior staff service and exceptional ambience. Some of the fine winners of the 2019 World Class Award are profiled on the following pages. **I&FMM**

### CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAUS

- Discover The Palm Beaches  
West Palm Beach, FL
- Experience Scottsdale  
Scottsdale, AZ
- Greater Fort Lauderdale  
Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Fort Lauderdale, FL
- Greater Miami  
Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Miami, FL
- Hawaii Visitors &  
Convention Bureau  
Honolulu, HI
- Las Vegas Convention  
and Visitors Authority  
Las Vegas, NV
- Nashville Convention  
& Visitors Corp.  
Nashville, TN
- San Francisco  
Travel Association  
San Francisco, CA
- Visit Austin  
Austin, TX
- Visit Charlotte  
Charlotte, NC
- VisitDallas  
Dallas, TX
- VISIT DENVER  
Denver, CO
- Visit Jacksonville  
Jacksonville, FL
- Visit Tucson  
Tucson, AZ

### HOTELS, RESORTS & CONFERENCE CENTERS

- ARIA Resort & Casino  
Las Vegas, NV
- Arizona Biltmore, A Waldorf  
Astoria Resort  
Phoenix, AZ
- Atlantis, Paradise Island,  
Bahamas  
Paradise Island, The Bahamas

- Aulani, A Disney Resort & Spa  
Ko Olina, HI
- Boca Raton Resort & Club,  
A Waldorf Astoria Resort  
Boca Raton, FL
- The Breakers Palm Beach  
Palm Beach, FL
- The Broadmoor  
Colorado Springs, CO
- Caesars Palace  
Las Vegas, NV
- The Diplomat Beach  
Resort Hollywood, Curio  
Collection by Hilton  
Hollywood, FL
- Fontainebleau Miami Beach  
Miami Beach, FL
- Fort Lauderdale Marriott Harbor  
Beach Resort & Spa  
Fort Lauderdale, FL
- Gaylord Opryland Resort  
& Convention Center  
Nashville, TN
- Loews Portofino Bay Hotel  
at Universal Orlando  
Orlando, FL
- M Resort Spa Casino  
Las Vegas, NV
- Ocean Reef Club  
Key Largo, FL
- Omni Orlando Resort  
at ChampionsGate  
Orlando, FL
- The Ritz-Carlton  
Golf Resort, Naples  
Naples, FL
- Sea Island Resort  
Sea Island, GA
- Trump National Doral Miami  
Miami, FL
- Walt Disney World Swan  
and Dolphin Resort  
Lake Buena Vista, FL
- Wynn Las Vegas  
Las Vegas, NV



VISIT DENVER



ATLANTIS, PARADISE ISLAND, BAHAMAS



OMNI ORLANDO RESORT AT CHAMPIONSGATE



SEA ISLAND RESORT



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## VISIT AUSTIN

**W**hy Austin? Why not? Finding fault with The Live Music Capital of the World is almost as tough as narrowing down the 10 best reasons to meet there.

**1. Flying here is easy and convenient.** Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA), which saw a record number of passengers in 2018 and underwent a \$350 million expansion that added nine new gates in early 2019, has more than 350 daily flights to 70-plus nonstop locations around the world.

**2. Everyone loves the Austin Convention Center.** Its green (LEED Gold certified), it's close to everything (with that prime downtown location), and it's state-of-the-art (Wi-Fi is fast and free!). What's not to love?

**3. It's group friendly.** Many of the attractions that make Austin such a popular destination with

visitors are capable of accommodating private events, including barbecue joints, waterfront venues on Lake Austin, and of course its 250-plus live music venues.

**4. Groups can tap into its energetic spirit.** The birthplace of Whole Foods, Dell, and South by Southwest has one of the busiest startup scenes in the country, not to mention a creative community that produces some seriously talented artists, musicians and chefs.

**5. It's a wellspring of inspiration.** Finding speakers or collaborators for

inspired programming is easy since Austin's intellectual capital is rich and diverse. For example, health-care groups can work with the University of Texas at Austin's Dell Medical School and local biotech firms.

**6. It's powered by music.** From live bands greeting attendees at the airport to private concert finales, Austin's famous live music scene supplies a constant stream of entertainment options for meetings.

**7. The hotel options are shiny, new, and plentiful.** Austin has more than 42,000 total hotel rooms (13,000 downtown). Surrounding the Convention Center are its four largest hotels: Fairmont Austin (1,048 rooms), JW Marriott Austin (1,012 rooms), Hilton Austin (801 rooms), and Marriott Downtown (612 rooms, opening 2020). Outside of downtown, take advantage of Austin's justifiably famous Hill Country resorts including: Horseshoe Bay Resort (400 rooms), Hyatt Lost Pines Resort & Spa (491 rooms), Lake Austin Spa Resort (40 rooms), Lakeway Resort & Spa (175 rooms), Miraval Austin (117 rooms), Omni Barton Creek Resort & Spa (493 rooms) and Kalahari Resorts & Conventions Round Rock (975 rooms, opening 2020).

**8. It's a city where attendees can really dig in.** One could argue that the state capital of Texas might also be its culinary capital. The cuisines are many, the tacos and barbecue are legendary, and the cocktails are fiercely potent.

**9. Feeling safe is a given.** Attendees can explore downtown without worry.

**10. Austin is authentic.** There's no mistaking where you are when you're in Austin. It's a sure bet that attendees will fall hard for Austin, making it an ideal place to meet year after year.

Visit [meet.austintexas.org](http://meet.austintexas.org)



### CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

**Guest Rooms:** 41,897 (citywide)

**Hotels/Resorts:** 361

**Meeting Space:** 1,344,266 sf (representing the Austin Convention Center and full-service hotels)

**Special Amenities:** The Austin Convention Center offers 247,052 sf of contiguous, column-free exhibit space, two ballrooms of 40,510 and 23,000 sf each, and 54 meeting rooms.



# IF YOU WANT TO SEE A CITY MAKE ROOM FOR THE FUTURE



Austin is growing every day. With a wide variety of offsite venues and growing hotel space, our city is ready to welcome you. Come see how the Live Music Capital of the World® can offer you a unique meeting experience. Keep up to date on all of Austin's venues at [visitaustin.org/meet](http://visitaustin.org/meet).



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 miamiandbeaches.com

## GREATER MIAMI CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

**F**rom perfect weather, pristine beaches, and top-rated attractions to world-class hotels, dining, and a thriving arts and culture scene, Miami has everything you need to host the meeting or convention of your dreams. Few places in the world deliver such a thriving mix of international sophistication, natural tropical beauty and authentic cultural diversity as Miami.

### LATIN, CARIBBEAN FLAVORS

Miami is a place where beauty and richness await to be found across the city, particularly among the many hidden gems it offers. Miami's diverse neighborhoods are a great place to start, where visitors are encouraged to explore the rich cultural roots that make Miami an incredible melting pot. Discover the Latin flavors of Little Havana or the Caribbean heritage of Little Haiti. Stroll through the street art district of Wynwood or the charming bohemian neighborhood of Coconut Grove. If you seek a more cosmopolitan edge, the bustling epicenter of Downtown Miami, with its gleaming skyscrapers, sweeping waterfront bay views, and endless shopping and dining possibilities, is the perfect neighborhood for you.

And no journey to Miami is complete without exploring iconic South Beach, where the eclectic lifestyles and colorful art deco architecture

come to life. Along with the stunning beauty of its beaches and colorful buildings, South Beach also offers a diverse mix of world-class boutiques, galleries and stores.

### HEADQUARTER HOTEL PLANS

A vibrant and dynamic global hub, Miami continues to reinvent itself with incredible hotels, meeting spaces and enhanced infrastructure. Among the creative venue options is the reimagined Miami Beach Convention Center, featuring nearly 500,000 sf of versatile exhibition space and more than 180,000 sf of meeting space, including a 60,000-sf grand ballroom, a 20,000-sf junior ballroom, and 84 breakout rooms. The space also features a terrace where attendees can step out, mingle, and soak up the city's signature sunshine and ocean breeze. The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau is excited to announce that the Miami Beach Convention Center will soon be home to a connecting 800-room headquarter hotel, making Miami the ultimate convenient meeting destination.

Miami is also easy to get to, with Miami International Airport (MIA) offering more than 400 flights from around the globe daily and serving more airlines than any other airport in the U.S. If you are already in Florida, try the Brightline, a stylish express train service that provides intercity travel, connecting Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach, with service between Miami and Orlando coming soon.

These are just a few of the memorable and magical highlights awaiting any meeting planner considering Miami. Visit [miamiandbeaches.com](http://miamiandbeaches.com) for more.

# ONE



# CITY



### CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

- Guest Rooms:** 55,394
- Hotels/Resorts:** 426
- Meeting Space:** 1.2 million sf
- Special Amenities:** The Miami Beach Convention Center features nearly 500,000 sf of versatile exhibition space.

When it comes to planning your next meeting, Miami has it all. Breathtaking landscapes and diverse neighborhoods set the perfect stage for innovative art, world-class entertainment and family-friendly attractions that visitors never forget. Plan your next meeting today.

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## MANY DESTINATIONS.



[MiamiMeetings.com](http://MiamiMeetings.com)



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#### CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

**Guest Rooms/Suites:** 400

**Meeting Space:** 42,000 sf (interior)

#### Special Services & Amenities:

Sea Island's rooms and suites offer views from oceanfront and river view to golf course. In addition to 42,000 sf of interior meeting and event space, Sea Island's setting as a barrier island provides myriad outdoor event options as well, from casual, overlooking the river and marsh to oceanfront, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. When it comes to dining, the culinary team ensures that cuisine is customized to meet the theme, style, budget and goals of every event. Nine restaurants offer dining experiences ranging from casual, oceanfront to Forbes Five-Star. As a semitropical island, Sea Island enjoys an average year-round high temperature of 75 degrees and an average low of 60 degrees.

## SEA ISLAND



**S**teeped in golf tradition, Sea Island is home to three championship golf courses, including Seaside and Plantation, site of the PGA TOUR's RSM Classic, hosted each fall by Davis Love III, Sea Island touring professional, two-time Ryder Cup Captain and 2017 inductee into the World Golf Hall of Fame. With 15 holes flanked by views of the ocean, sound and marsh, Seaside is Sea Island's signature course. Retreat Course, originally designed by Joe Lee, was renovated in 2001 by Davis and Mark Love and features a unique, dramatic layout. Created in 1928 by Walter Travis and redesigned by Rees Jones in 1999, Plantation has again been redesigned, this time by Davis Love III and his brother Mark, as part of a \$30 million enhancement program for golf and The Lodge at Sea Island.

#### GOLF & LODGE UPGRADES

Located between Seaside and Plantation, The Lodge at Sea Island recently added an 18-hole putting course called The Speedway, seven new cottages with 18 new sleeping rooms, an oceanfront pool and pool house and a new, 17,000-sf, state-of-the-art Golf Performance Center. Now being called by some the finest such center in the world, it features six instruction and club-fitting bays, cutting-edge putting studio, golf club workshop, gym, and indoor and outdoor meeting and event spaces. Phil Kenyon,

director of putting instruction and one of the most sought-after putting instructors in the world, has designed the new putting studio for teaching and putter fitting. The Center teaches every aspect of the game to all skill levels, from juniors to Open and Masters Champions.

#### AN OVERVIEW

Since 1928, Sea Island has been known as an exceptional destination appealing to those who appreciate gracious service and heartfelt hospitality. With four Forbes Five-Star experiences – The Cloister at Sea Island, The Lodge at Sea Island, The Spa at Sea Island and the Georgian Room restaurant – it is the only resort in the world to have received four Forbes Five-Star Awards for 11 consecutive years.

The only U.S. resort to host a G-8 Summit of world leaders, Sea Island provides exceptional settings and service for conferences and executive retreats. Guest accommodations are available at The Cloister, a Mediterranean masterpiece; The Lodge, reminiscent of an English country manor or The Inn at Sea Island. A cottage option is also available.

On the Georgia coast between Jacksonville, Florida (JAX, 60 minutes) and Savannah, Georgia (SAV, 75 minutes), Sea Island is served by two additional airports, including Brunswick (BQK, 20 minutes) and the private McKinnon St. Simons Airport (SSI, 10 minutes). **I&FMM**

## THE BROADMOOR

**T**he Broadmoor and its Wilderness Experiences encompass a total of 5,000 acres within the breathtaking Pikes Peak region. The main resort has 784 guest rooms and suites, championship golf courses, an award-winning spa, unique retail, and 20 diverse restaurants, cafes and lounges. The Broadmoor's unparalleled combination of an illustrious history of innovation and distinctive culture of service has made it one of the country's premier event destinations for more than 100 years.

The Broadmoor and The Broadmoor's Wilderness Experiences are the perfect destinations in which to enjoy a temperate climate, consisting of 300 days of sunshine and low humidity. Because of the beautiful weather, visitors to The Broadmoor spend much of their time outdoors hiking, soaring, mountain biking, fly fishing or simply relaxing by the pool.

The grounds are home to not one but two championship golf courses, a nationally recognized tennis program, and a Forbes Five-Star spa and fitness center. There's also plenty to choose from when it comes to shopping and dining, with 23 retail boutiques and 10 restaurants, including Colorado's only Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five-Diamond restaurant, Penrose Room.

Recreational activities include falconry, guided mountain biking, hiking, rock climbing tours, fly fishing, paintball, and more. The Broadmoor also offers three exciting attractions: Seven Falls, a magnificent series of waterfalls in a secluded canyon; The Broadmoor Soaring Adventure zip line courses, which fly thrill seekers over scenic, wild terrain for the ultimate adrenaline rush; and the Pikes Peak Cog Railway.

From April through early November, you can also enjoy The Broadmoor Wilderness Experience boutique

properties, The Ranch at Emerald Valley, Cloud Camp, and the Orvis – Endorsed Fly Fishing Camp. All three of these all-inclusive enclaves offer Colorado mountain adventures complete with Broadmoor-quality food and service.

While The Broadmoor may feel remote, it is easily accessible for guests from around the country and the world. Only a 15-minute drive from the resort, Colorado Springs Airport is serviced by nonstop flights via multiple cities and major airlines. Additionally Denver International Airport, which offers connections to many international destinations, is located just over an hour north. Door-to-door shuttle or sedan service from both airports is available through the resort's transportation partners at Gray Line.



Not only is The Broadmoor the perfect place to celebrate your incentive trip but it is an epic location to host meetings. Spring of 2020 debuts the 125,000-sf Exhibit Hall. This welcome addition solidifies The Broadmoor as the most luxurious property with the ability to host exhibits and trade shows within its footprint. The Broadmoor is the longest-running Forbes Five-Star, AAA Five-Diamond hotel in the country and can be enjoyed by travelers of any group size. **I&FMM**



**Pepper Dombroski**

*Director of National Sales*

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broadmoor.com

#### CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES

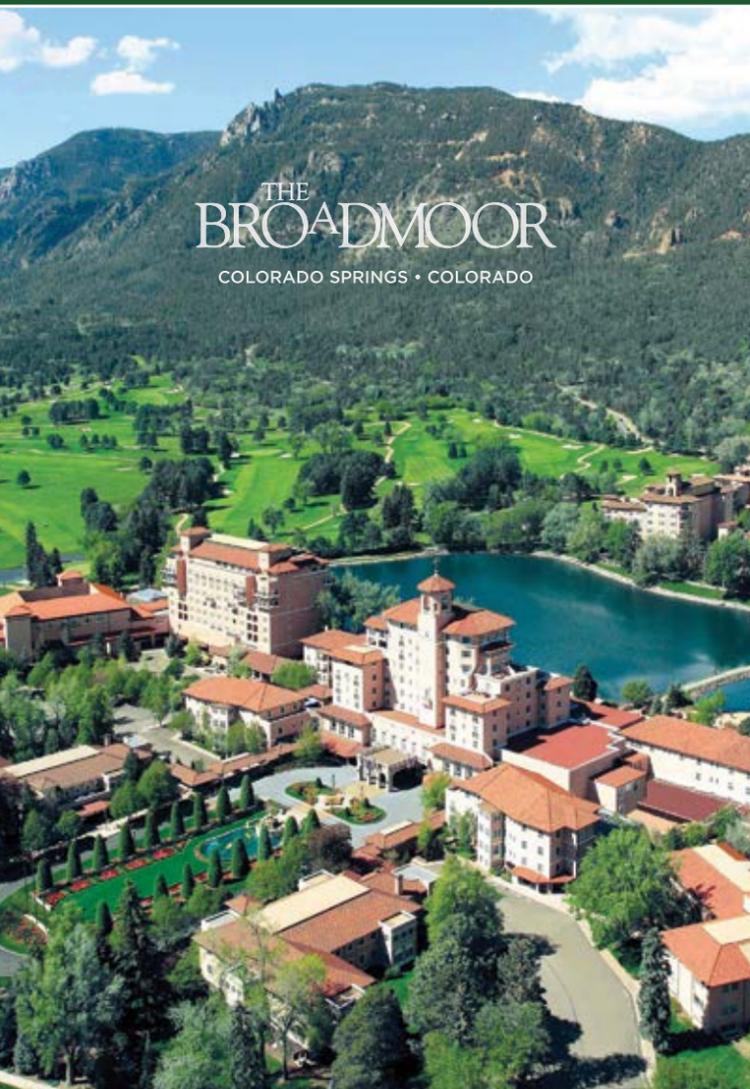
**Guest Rooms:** 784

**Meeting Space:** 310,000 sf

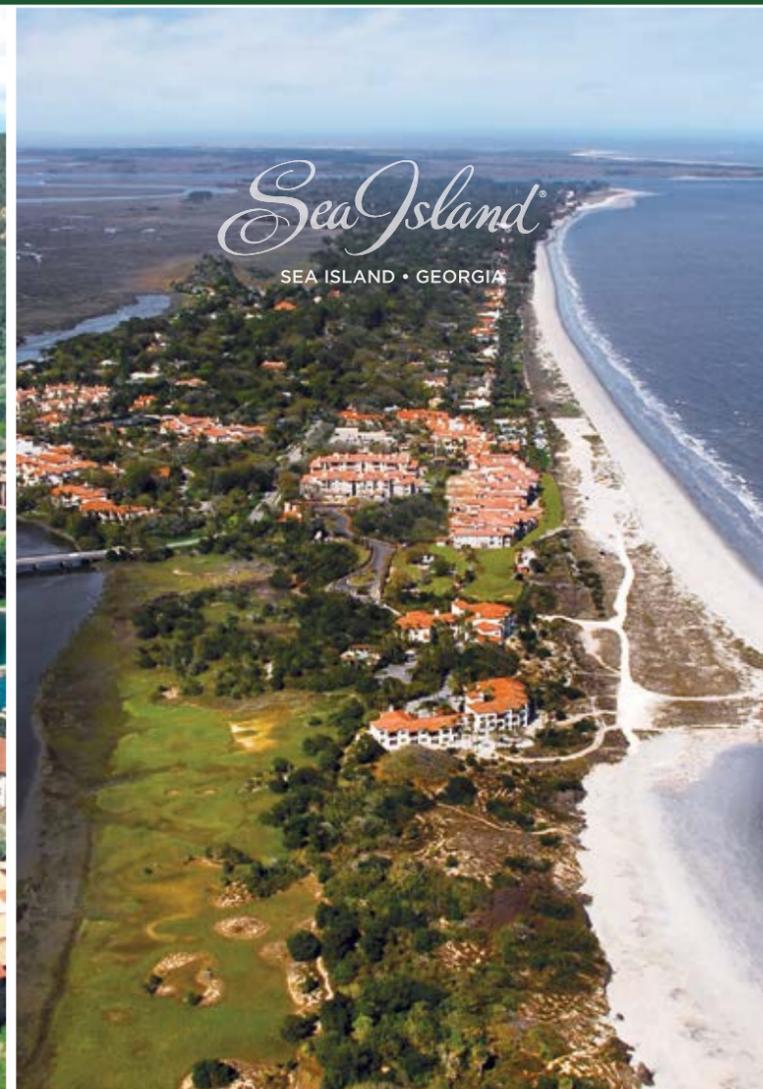
**Special Amenities:** Enjoy two championship golf courses or luxuriate in the Forbes Five-Star spa. Experience guided fly fishing, pickleball, tennis and falconry, or fly over wilderness canyons with The Broadmoor Soaring Adventure.

# THE BROADMOOR • Sea Island COMPANY

Two exceptional resorts. Now one family.



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COLORADO SPRINGS • COLORADO



Sea Island  
SEA ISLAND • GEORGIA

**Recognized a total of 251 times with Forbes Five-Star and AAA Five-Diamond awards.**

For 190 years, The Broadmoor and Sea Island have provided distinctive, magnificent settings and extraordinary experiences for groups ranging from intimate board meetings to trade shows. Each resort features world-class golf, dining, spa, and outdoor adventures to enhance your event. With both of these iconic properties in a 100-year family trust, our guarantee is that while the setting will vary, the consistent quality of meetings and meticulous attention to detail never will.

We invite you to call to begin planning your next event.

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## THE BROADMOOR

*Recipient of the Forbes Five-Star award for 59 consecutive years, The Broadmoor is a strikingly unique destination for memorable meetings and events. The Broadmoor has offered guests an incredible way to experience the unique gateway to the American West for nearly a century.*

### **Meeting Space— Unique**

With 185,000 square feet of sophisticated event space, The Broadmoor understands the unique needs and attention required to create memorable, successful meetings. From boardrooms and Broadmoor Hall's 60,000 square feet at the main campus to Cloud Camp's Overlook at 9,200-foot elevation, we have the space to make your meeting memorable.

### **Activities— For Everyone**

Meeting attendees can hike scenic trails, experience horseback riding and mountain biking, or archery. Broadmoor Outfitters offers expert instruction in fly fishing, falconry, zip lining and much more. Championship golf courses, and our Forbes Five-Star Spa provide rest and reward.

### **Accommodations— Variety**

The 784 guest rooms, suites, cottages, brownstones, and The Broadmoor Estate House feature the elegant touches and amenities at the main campus. Provide adventure at one of the three Broadmoor Wilderness Experiences: Cloud Camp, The Ranch at Emerald Valley, and The Broadmoor Fly Fishing Camp.



## Sea Island

*Where extraordinary facilities, activities and Southern hospitality blend to create exceptional meetings. Come see why we are the only resort in the world to receive four Forbes Five Stars for eleven consecutive years and the only one in the U.S. chosen to host a G8 Summit.*



### **Meeting Space— Flexibility**

With more than 42,000 square feet of indoor space and an island full of outdoor gathering options, Sea Island venues range from boardrooms to ballrooms, accommodating 5 to 500 people. From food and décor to technical expertise, our seasoned team brings creativity and attention to detail to every conference, executive retreat, and customized meeting.

### **Activities— Variety**

Sea Island provides an extensive array of options for your meeting attendees including customized team building activities, outdoor experiences such as fishing, water sports, shooting school and falconry, a 65,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, championship golf courses, and the nation's finest Golf Performance Center.

### **Accommodations— Choice**

Our 400 rooms and suites ensure we have a room type to meet your needs from The Cloister, nestled between the Black Banks River and the Atlantic Ocean to The Lodge, overlooking golf and the ocean, The Inn, our select-service property. Or for those seeking outdoor adventure, we offer Broadfield, our 5,800-acre sporting club.



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 caesars.com/caesars-palace

**CITYWIDE FACTS & FEATURES**

**Guest Rooms:** 4,022, including Nobu Hotel's 182 rooms, 18 suites and one villa.

**Meeting Space:** 300,000 sf of meeting/convention/ ballroom facilities.

**Special Amenities:** Add a memorable twist to your event by hosting it at the newly renovated Colosseum, the multilevel OMNIA nightclub, or the 4.5-acre Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis.

**CAESARS PALACE**



**O**ur five towers, which include high-end suites and villas, will make every guest feel like royalty.

The grandeur and lavishness of Caesars Palace extends triumphantly into 300,000 sf of stately meeting facilities. Our conference center is ideal for meetings with direct access to the Palace Tower and comfortably set apart from the casino area. These two stories include two 51,000-sf ballrooms that can be configured into 25 separate breakout rooms and overlooks the Garden of the Gods Pool Oasis. Meeting planners will find an outstanding range of flexible meeting spaces to accommodate large-scale productions or small groups.

Add a twist to your event by hosting it at one of our unique special venues. The Colosseum, home of the greatest entertainers in the world, is available for general sessions. Imagine your CEO on the same stage graced by Madonna and Jerry Seinfeld. In summer 2019, The Colosseum underwent a transformation that includes a state-of-the-art sound system, new moving light fixtures, a hi-def LED video wall, and refurbished seating to enhance the theater's comfort.

We are here to advise meeting planners every step of the way when it comes to F&B as well – whether they want a

breakfast buffet, snack breaks, boxed or plated lunches or an elegant dinner banquet. Caesars Entertainment will help create the ideal menu to fit their vision and budget, from seafood and poultry or gluten free, vegetarian and vegan options.

Caesars Entertainment features more than 100 restaurants, cafes and lounges. All our restaurants welcome groups and complete buyouts are available. We offer a dine-around arrangement, allowing guests to sample different venues. Caesars Palace has an array of award-winning restaurants from celebrity chefs such as Bobby Flay's Mesa Grill, Gordon Ramsay's Hell's Kitchen, Nobu Matsuhisa's Nobu Restaurant & Lounge, Pronto by Giada de Laurentiis, and Restaurant Guy Savoy.

In April 2019, Caesars Entertainment opened Vanderpump Cocktail Garden with television star and restaurateur Lisa Vanderpump. Available for events of up to 150, Vanderpump Cocktail Garden is the newest addition to the iconic, Los Angeles-based Vanderpump empire and offers exclusive cocktails and bites in a garden oasis setting.

Flexibility is key with Caesars Entertainment. With one phone call you have access to all our properties within one destination. One contact, one contract and one food and beverage minimum. The possibilities are endless with Caesars Entertainment. **I&FMM**



**CAESARS PALACE**

**LAS VEGAS**

CaesarsMeansBusiness.com





ALLEN

The Ballantyne, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Charlotte, in North Carolina has named **Beth Allen** director of sales and marketing. Allen will oversee all direct sales, public relations and marketing communications for the hotel. Previously, Allen served as director of sales and marketing at Capella Hotel Group's Solis Hotel in Atlanta.

**Heather Allison** has been appointed complex director of sales and marketing for New York Marriott Marquis and Sheraton New York Times Square. In her new role, Allison will oversee all sales and marketing efforts for these major New York City hotel properties. She brings more than 25 years of hospitality experience to her new role.

Union Station Hotel Nashville in Tennessee has promoted **Trevor Bondarchuk** to director of sales and marketing. Bondarchuk joined the property as director of sales in May 2019, and previously spent two years as director of group sales and events for Sage Hospitality in the Pacific Northwest.

Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate has welcomed **LeAnn Davis** as director of sales and marketing. Davis will oversee the direction of the sales team, drive revenue streams for the resort, contribute to the group and convention sales strategy and provide executive leadership. Davis brings to her new role more than 13 years of large hotel sales leadership experience and more than 26 years of sales hospitality experience.

New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has named **Austin Deeks** ancillary sales manager. In his new role, Deeks will be responsible for the promotion, sale and coordination of the production, technology and digital capabilities of the Convention Center, and helping clients with their technology and production needs.

Atlantis, Paradise Island, Bahamas has appointed **Bryan Gay** as senior vice president of sales. Gay will oversee group and leisure sales, wedding and event planning and conference planning for the resort. He brings more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry to his new role.

New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has welcomed **Gina Locatto** as special events sales manager for the Convention Center. In her new role, Locatto will focus on the sales of non-traditional events in the facility, including all of the Convention Center's Mardi Gras events, consumer shows and local corporate events.

Hard Rock International has named **Donna Marchese** as regional director of global sales – Americas. In this role, Marchese will be responsible for building awareness for the iconic Hard Rock brand, developing relationships with key group clients and agencies in the Northeast, and ultimately driving business to the entire portfolio.

Omni Hotels & Resorts in Irving, Texas has promoted **Andrew Rubinacci** to chief commercial officer. Rubinacci joined Omni a year ago as senior vice president of revenue management and global distribution. In his new role, Rubinacci will drive revenue generation across the organization, aligning marketing, revenue management, distribution and sales to better optimize performance. In addition, Omni has promoted **Dan Surette** to chief sales officer. In his new role, Surette will intensify efforts across all sales channels for Omni Hotels & Resorts. Additionally, Surette will oversee Omni's strategic partnerships on behalf of the brand. I&FMM



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